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Elegant Egbert; OR, THE GLOVED HAND.

A MISSISSIPPI RIVER ROMANCE.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE,
AUTHOR OF "A HARD CROWD," "THE CREOLE
COUSINS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
THE MAN.

ST. LOUIS a quarter of a century since!
Leaning carelessly against the fore-guards of
one of the many steamboats lying along her
levee, stood a man who in physique displayed
that perfect adaptation of parts best described

by the epithet *elegant*. The idea was further
carried out in matters of dress, from his spot-
less linen to the kid gloves which incased his
hands, whence the appellation by which he was
familiarily known—"Elegant" Egbert.

A close observer, studying his face while he
was absorbed in the animated scene spread out
before and below him—the transportation of
freight to and from the deck of the steamer by
a double line of hurrying roustabouts, the arri-
val and departure of passengers, etc.—might
have detected something, whether of the eyes
or lips, or both, which bespoke a soul over-
shadowed by a great sorrow. But struggling
through the film, so to speak, of sadness, there
appeared in his eyes a hard look, and about his
lips a stern set which told the soul's fierce pro-
test.

Suddenly the man starts; his face lights, dis-
pelling the shadow like a burst of sunshine; and
with a half-suppressed ejaculation he bends over
the guard.

An open barouche sweeps down the levee, a
gentleman leaps out, assists two ladies to alight,
and escorts them on board the steamer.

The gentleman is tall and well-formed, with
the off-hand frankness of a kindly nature born
to command. Blessed with a sanguine tempera-
ment and the sound health of an active life un-
impaired by dissipation, Felix Cornish is ready
to grasp every honest man by the hand and slap
him on the back for a clever fellow. According
to his philosophy, only upstarts and dyspeptics
stand on their dignity. And yet there is that
about him which shows that, his pride once
roused, he could be as immovable as a cliff of
granite.

Of Mrs. Cornish, Felix's mother, we need
only say here that she has that *hauteur* of
manner not unfrequently affected by ladies who
pride themselves on their family. F. F. V. is
with her an ever-present consciousness.

But it is the younger lady who claims Elegant
Egbert's attention.



"AH! MONSIEUR STANHOPE, I OWE YOU PARDON, IF I INTRUDE UPON YOUR MOMENT OF PRIVACY."

It was a happy inspiration that fixed upon the name of Sibyl for her. With her tall form vested in the flowing draperies of the East, and her dark face alight with holy enthusiasm, she might well have served as the oracle of some weird grove, or as a priestess in some grand old temple. In more modern costume, and surrounded by the civilization which has wrested the temporal scepter from the church and put "Old Probabilities" in the place of omen and augury, she takes her place as a social queen, where her glowing brunette beauty sends a warm thrill to the heart of every observer.

When this woman passed from his view, the swift pallor of pain overspread Elegant Egbert's face. He set his teeth with a tremulous inhalation that was almost a sob, and clenched his hand so fiercely that the glove split across the back.

The paroxysm was as brief as it was intense.

Then a sardonic laugh rose to his lips.

"Bah!" he muttered; "I thought I was done with such folly. What can such as she be to one like me? Me!"

And he seemed to spit the word forth, so withering was his self-contempt.

Thrice the steamboat whistles blew their discordant signal. The bow bell was rung, the gangplanks hauled aboard, and the nose of the "River Queen" swung out into the stream.

Impatiently Elegant Egbert brushed the cold drops of sweat from his forehead with his handkerchief, and raised his hat, baring his throbbing temples to the cool breeze caused by the motion of the boat as she gained headway down the stream.

When they had passed below the city, he saw the last red streaks of departing day. Then the full moon rose, a blood-red disk, above the trees along the eastern bank of the river.

For perhaps half an hour the solitary man stood looking straight before him in gloomy introspection. Then he roused himself with an impatient shake.

Removing his gloves, one of which had been destroyed as we have described, he rolled them together and threw them into the river. Before donning a fresh pair, which he drew from his pocket, he stretched out his right hand in the darkness, which the red moon as yet did little toward dispelling, and muttered, fiercely: "When God willed that the hand of every man should be turned against Cain, he branded him on the forehead!"

After a momentary pause, during which he breathed hard through his set teeth, he burst into a discordant laugh, and said:

"Poor Cain!"

With painstaking deliberation he drew on the gloves and adjusted them to the hand.

"Now back to the farce of life!" he sneered, and entered the lighted cabin.

The first sight that met his view was Felix Cornish, chatting easily with the clerk of the boat.

The first sound that greeted his ear was a man's voice raised in unbridled distress, crying:

"Ah! mon Dieu! Mon argent, c'est ma vie! Helene! Helene! Je t'ai perdu!" (Oh, God! My money is my life! Helene! Helene! I have lost you!)

CHAPTER II.

THE WOES OF M. BOURDOINE.

At a small round table in the forward end of the River Queen sat a fair specimen of a Mississippi river gambler of the old school, yclept "Long Jack." Every inch of his six feet of stature proclaimed the "sport"—a white beaver bell-crown hat, with a "weeper" a hand in breadth; mustaches waxed to needle-points; neckcloth gay with red and yellow; blue "claw-hammer" coat with brass buttons; gaudy waistcoat; cross-bar pantaloons, very tight in the legs and strapped down over gray-checked gaiter-tops; a heavy-linked gold chain, reaching round the neck; diamond studs; skull and cross-bone sleeve-buttons in cameo; and a large amethyst seal ring. Add to this, a ratan cane, as slender as a willow wand, and, held in leash by a silken cord, a diminutive bull-dog, not more than six inches in height.

Vis-a-vis with Long Jack sat a dapper little Frenchman, whose most marked feature was an enormous imperial and mustache, in better proportion for the Cardiff giant than for its actual wearer. He spoke with that lightning volubility only attained by his volatile nation, accompanying his words with a play of gesture and abruptness of transition.

Now his fingers were spread and his shoulders shrugged up to his ears, while there was left

scarcely an inch of deeply corrugated forehead between his arched brows and the roots of his hair. Anon he ran his fingers through his hair, and shook his head from side to side, as if on the verge of distraction. At one moment he laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks, and the next he was the impersonation of utter woe.

"Ah! Monsieur Longe Jaque," he sighed, "I see you have ze heart sympathetique. You will note refuse to drope ze tear vis un des miserables! (one of the wretched ones).

"Helas! ze heart of ze exile is heavy! Paris! Paris! vat spote in ze vide, vide world, is like Paris, l'adorable!"

"I am a young man. I live in ze housetop—five story. Eh, bien! I have air and sunlight. So moche ze better for my art. I paint—paint—paint. Am I tired?—puff! puff! puff!—I have my pipe. Am I hungry?—tap! tap! tap! tap!—four stairs—ching! I flip my sou on ze counter—'Bon soir, Madame Gouchement. Un petit pate, s'il vous plait. Voilà mon souper! (Good-evening, Mrs. Gouchement. A little patty, if you please. Behold my supper! Am I lonely? am I sick? am I sad?—allons! allons! (away!—ah! le grand Boulevard! Ze light—twinkle! twinkle! twinkle! Ze horse—prance! prance! prance! Ze music—trom! pom! pom! Ze lady smile—ze child laugh—ze soljair marsh! marsh! Beautie, perfume, happiness everyver! Ah! cela c'est la vie! (Ah! that is life!)

"And mon ami! mon ami! le Jardin Mabille! Ha! ha! ha! ha! Mille diables! Ha! ha! ha! ha! Oh, mon Dieu! Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

In the wild conjurings of his recollections the volatile Frenchman had lost every trace of sadness. He launched forth into a description of the famous Parisian resort, until Long Jack recalled him to the original purpose of his narration by the question:

"And Helene accompanied you in these visits?"

"Ah! Helene! Helene!" sighed M. Bourdoine, plunging again into the depths of woe. But I must tell you the tale melancholique.

"I love my art—I adore my art! When ze sun shine and ze bird sing I have my little holiday in la campagne—vat you call—countrie. I lie on my back under ze tree. I watch the vite cloud sail in ze bleu. Ze rivair tinkle! tinkle! tinkle! ze bird tweet! tweet! tweet! Ecoute! (hark!) vat I hear? A voice angelique! I start; I rise so—on my elbow; I look here, I peep zere.

"Ah! mon Dieu! vat heavenly sight meet my view! A form celestial! A naiaid vis ze hair flowing like sunbeams! Her leetle foot, vite—ah! ciel! vat shall I say?—like a lily float in ze vater of the streamlet. Ze vater kiss ze foot and laugh. Ze sun peep, but ze tree put up his leaf-hand to hide ze ankle.

"Grace de Dieu! eet is romantic! Moi! (I)—I am jealous of zee little bird zat shall look! I hold my breath, I put my hand on my heart. Allons, donc!—she looks up!—she sees me.

"Ah! she scream so. Like ze fawn afright, she jump up and shall run away.

"Pardon! mille pardons!" I cry; 'ma'm'selle shall have no fear. Who shall harm vone of soche divine beautie? See! I am a painter. Ma'm'selle shall let me put her form peerless, her smile angelique, on my canvas. Ah! I shall paint a picture zat shall hang in ze Palais Royal!"

"Allons, donc! she blush, she laugh, she sit again on ze rivair bank. I arrange her robe! Ah! vone shall take care!—so! Now ze foot peep from under ze robe, ze hair ripple over ze shouldair, ze eyes—ah, le ciel n'est pas si bleu! (the sky is not so blue!)

"I paint, I make love! My divinity smile; she drop her head on my shouldair; I feel her heart flutter like ze bird; I drink ze perfume of her breath. Grace a Dieu! la belle Helene est la mienne! (Thank God! the beautiful Helene is my own!)"

"And you marry her and take her to Paris?" asked Long Jack.

"Marier! repeated M. Bourdoine, with a shrug of amazement. "Pourquoi? (wherefore?) Diable! I am note rich. Vere-of shall I furnish a house? Vere-of shall I hire servants? Vere-of shall I buy ze horse and carriage? Eh, bien! I have no establishment. My art is adorable—my art is divine; but ven I have my chocolate in ze morning, my ragout at noon, and my petit pate at night—sacrebleu! I have no sou left!"

"No. I tell to la belle Helene ze beantie of Paris until her eyes sparkle like ze drop of vater in ze stream. Vone veek I tarry vis ze bird and tree and flower. Ven I go back to my

garret in ze heuse-top, my affinite, la belle Helene, is nestling in my heart! Eh, bien! verefore shall ve call in ze notary or ze priest to plate via iron ze golden link zat bind us!—ze tie celestial ze affinite of ze soul!"

"In ze housetop ve make a paradise, vis vone Adam and vone Eve. It note take money to do zat—no servant, no equipage, no establishment. I have my art, my chocolate, my ragout, my petit pate—ciel sur monde! (heaven on earth!) I have Helene angelique! And Helene!—she is nimble of ze finger and shall make toys. She sing ze whole day long! Vy note?—she have her Gaspard!"

"Helas!" sighed M. Bourdoine, indicating by voice, look and gesture the beginning of the sad portion of his story, "in ze evening I take my divinite to ze opera. Parbleu! her smile is like ze shimmer of angel vings! Her eyes sparkle, her cheeks flush, she grasp my arm and tremble, and pant, so—ha! ha! ha!"

And M. Bourdoine, with vivid pantomime, reproduced the excitement and delight of an impulsive girl on her initiation to the wonders of a French play-house.

"All ze way home she can note walk. She dance, she skip, she caper. Vonce more in ze housetop paradise, she cry: 'Le ballet! le ballet!' Ah, Dieu! ve two must dance ze ballet!"

"Bote my divinite have no costume—vat you call?—tight. N'importe! (no matter!) La Nature had her given vone costume unapproachable! Grand ciel! cela fut une danze guss dieux! (Great Heaven! there was a dance for the gods!)

"All day long she smile and smile, and vat a petits pas (with tripping steps) and ven ze night come she cry: 'Le ballet! le ballet!' She sit on my knee; she twine her lovely arms about my neck; her fragrant lips kiss mine; vis her silken palm she pat my cheek. 'Mon cher Gaspard, le ballet! le ballet!' Ven I frown she peep under my brows vis her starry eyes, and she say, so sweet: 'Aimable Gaspard! N'aites tu pas ta petite chérie? (Aimable Gaspard! Don't you love your little dearie?) Le ballet! le ballet!"

"Shall I say no! Sacrebleu! I am note ze stick or ze stone! I am flesh and blood! Last night, to-night, to-morrow night ve go to ze ballet. Ze manager sees Helene—her beaute angelique, her vivacite childlike—eh bien! vat eye does note!"

"Helas! vone leetle moment, vone moment execrable! I leave my angelique Helene alone. Ah! mon ami, pity ze misfortune! Ze manager—le diable in ze drama of my life—invade my paradise and tempt my Eve vis ze ballet!"

"Oh! moi miserable! No more my divinite dance for me alone! I see her behind ze foot-light. I hear ze house resound vis ze vociferation of ze public, gone mad vis ze ravishment of her beaute and of her grace.

"Oh! moi miserable! in my lost paradise I have a grand ladie; bote vere is my Helene angelique, my childlike Helene! Ze flatterie, ze bouquet, ze jewelrie! Ah! grace de ciel! ma petite! ma pauvre petite! (grace of heaven! my little one! my poor little one!)

"Vone night I go home—oh! moi miserable! On ze pillow vich her head seraphique has pressed is a bit of paper; a bouquet of forget-me-not shall hide ze writing execrable, zat it note tell me my Helene, ze affinite of my soul, has gone to America. On ze table is her handkerchief. See, monsieur! zis frail relique."

From his breast-pocket M. Bourdoine produced a dainty lace handkerchief, yellow with years and handling, and buried his face in it, to check his fast-falling tears, while he moaned:

"Helene! Helene! cœur de mon cœur! (core of my heart!)"

For a time the narrator was dissolved in a passion of tears. He soon recovered, and went on:

"Monsieur of ze heart sympathetique shall pardon ze outward manifestation of bereavement vere ze spirit has been broken for twenty long year. For twenty year I have follow ze affinite of my soul. I hear of her now here, now here! I go—helas! she is flown! Now I have vord from her in Memphis. Ah! monsieur, ze steamboat stand still! ze veel go back-ward! I pant! I fly! Helene! Helene! je viens! (I come!)"

CHAPTER III.

DESPAIR AND GRATITUDE A LA MODE FRANÇAISE.

LONG JACK had not plied M. Bourdoine with "ze distillation Amerique" for nothing. Though vital to our chronicle, the story to which we have just listened was merely incidental to the gambler's deep-laid scheme. Its real purpose

was seen in the fact that two minutes after the close of the narration of his life-sorrow M. Bourdoine's whole soul was engrossed in pairs, triplets and fours-of-a-kind; fulls, flushes and straights.

Waxing hilarious with success and furious at loss, trembling with anticipation when he held a good hand and frowning with vexation when fortune proved niggardly, the impulsive Frenchman was to the gambler as an open book.

On his part Long Jack's face was as impassible as that of his little bull-dog.

Beginning within reasonable bounds, the stakes were increased, as M. Bourdoine was goaded to recklessness by alcohol and loss, until the Frenchman leaped to his feet, tearing his hair, and crying the words that arrested Elegant Egbert's attention when he entered the saloon of the steamboat:

"*Ah! mon Dieu! Mon argent, c'est ma vie! Helene! Helene! Je t'ai perdu!*"

Bursting through the circle of spectators grouped about the table, he staggered a few steps blindly, a pistol-barrel gleamed in the lamplight, and a sharp report startled everybody aboard the boat.

But the tragedy was prevented. Elegant Egbert had leaped forward and caught the hand of the momentarily insane Frenchman, so that the ball pierced the cabin ceiling.

"*Allons donc!*" cried the desperate man, melodramatically. "Stope me note. *Je salue la mort!* (I hail death!) *Helene! Helene! Je t'ai perdu!*"

"Why, Monsieur Bourdoine, what is the matter?"

It was the voice of Felix Cornish, and the speaker grasped the would-be suicide, and constrained his attention.

"*Ah! grace a Dieu!* Eet is Monsieur Corneesh!" cried the Frenchman, recognizing his detainee; and without more ado clasped him in his arms and wept on his breast.

The forward end of the cabin was now filled with an excited crowd called from all parts of the boat. Several ladies had now come before the curtain which partitioned off the rear end of the cabin for their especial use, and stood pale and trembling spectators on the outskirts of the throng.

"What is it all about, gentlemen?" asked Felix Cornish, making himself heard above the Babel of voices.

Half a dozen vouchsafed the information, when M. Bourdoine himself took the word from their lips.

"*Ah! Monsieur Corneesh, cinq mille dollars!* (five thousand dollars!) All ze legacy sent of Heaven, by vich I shall recover *la belle Helene*—ze affinite of my soul! *Ah! mon bon ami, vas have I bote to die? Behold! behold!*"

And dragging Felix to the table he picked up his now empty pocket-book and flourished it about his head, much as a stage-Indian flourishes a scalp.

From the pocket-book slipped a ten-dollar gold-piece which had been overlooked. Picking it up the Frenchman displayed it between his finger and thumb.

"*Voila le dernier souvenir d'un pauvre sot!* (Behold the last remembrance of a poor (pitiable) fool!)" he cried, and added, with a sardonic laugh: "*Pardieu! d'un sot pauvre!* (of a poor (indigent) fool!)"

In his despair he could perpetrate a pun, by transposing the adjective *pauvre*.

Then he threw the coin from him in stazy disdain, crying:

"*A la mort! a la mort!* (to death! to death!)"

"I won't leave you without a stake," said Long Jack, tendering his late adversary a hundred-dollar bill; "and I wish you better luck next time."

There was little magnanimity in the act. It is a gambler's superstition that it is unlucky to leave his victim without a dollar.

M. Bourdoine waved the money back loftily. "A hundred dollars!" he cried. "*Ah, ciel!* vill zat find my Helene? Nol nol ze rivair vill drown my sorrow!"

The gold eagle which M. Bourdoine had tossed from him was snapped up and dropped into the pocket of the cabin-boy, who immediately assumed an unconscious air. But Egbert had seen him, and now demanded restitution.

When the coin was reluctantly yielded up to him, he said to M. Bourdoine:

"Wait, sir, until I see if I cannot retrieve your loss."

Turning to Long Jack, he pursued:

"I presume, sir, you have no objections to resuming the game, with a change of adversary?"

Long Jack looked up, and the eyes of the two men met.

Both started, and turned a shade paler.

A look of perplexity came into Long Jack's eyes, and while he studied every lineament of the other's face, he said slowly:

"If I mistake not, I have the honor of meeting a gentleman sometimes known as Elegant Egbert?"

"I am so known," admitted Egbert.

"I have heard of you, and am greatly pleased to make your acquaintance. I am not wholly without reputation, I think I may say, as Long Jack. No, sir; I have no objections to meeting you when and where you will, stakes limited or unlimited, as you choose."

"I only stipulate that each shall have a show for his money."

"Here, boy, bring us a dozen packs of cards."

For two hours neither Egbert nor Long Jack spoke a word beyond the technical phrases of the game. Then the latter rose and said:

"Mr. Egbert, I have had enough."

And addressing the crowd, with a smile which, under the circumstances, was a marked success, he pursued:

"I think, gentlemen, that you will all allow that ten thousand dollars at a sitting is not mean."

He was pale to the lips, but otherwise perfectly self-possessed.

What his secret thoughts were who could guess? It is safe to infer that Elegant Egbert had not made in him a stanch friend.

The successful contestant betrayed no emotion whatever, unless we take into account a slightly bored expression.

Quietly he handed to M. Bourdoine five thousand dollars, and the original ten-dollar gold piece, while the remainder he put into the breast-pocket of his coat, with seemingly as little concern as if it were an old newspaper.

But not so stoical was the Frenchman. With clasped hands and a face that was a study he gazed upon the money for a time without touching it.

"*Ah! ze delusive siren zat shall vin all heart—ze arbiter of joy and pain—ze power zat shall give me back my Helene angelique, or deny her to my arms!*" he apostrophized, in a sort of ecstasy.

Then seizing upon the money he pressed it to his lips and heart, and shed tears upon it, murmuring:

"Give me back my Helene—eet is all I ask!"

"And to you, monsieur," he pursued, raising his streaming eyes to Egbert's face, "do I owe ze princely gift—note only my life, bote zat vich shall bring joy and brightness into my life! Ah, monsieur, accept ze adoration of vone grateful heart, zat shall burst vis ze sentiment unutterable!"

And but for his shortness of stature he would have fallen upon his benefactor's neck. As it was, he clasped Egbert in his arms and bedewed his waistcoat with tears.

More than one of the spectators smiled at the effusive gratitude of the emotional foreigner, and one rough fellow muttered something about his being a "dog-gone fool."

But standing beneath the curtain which sequestered the ladies' cabin were two fair young creatures who were differently impressed.

Sibyl Cornish saw Elegant Egbert rest his hand kindly on M. Bourdoine's shoulder, while into his face came an expression of gentleness which made her womanly heart go out to him in grateful appreciation.

Looking about for some one with whom to share her emotions, she saw a *petite* blonde standing near her, with her face all alight with admiration, and perhaps something more.

"He is a noble gentleman, I know," said Sibyl, addressing the pretty stranger. "Do you observe that he appreciates the gratitude of the Frenchman, where almost any man would be impatient at its demonstrativeness?"

The blonde looked up with a glad smile.

"Thank you," she said. "He is my brother."

"Indeed?" exclaimed Sibyl, with a slight flush. "And the man to whom he has been so generous is my old French master."

Impulsively she extended her hand, which the blonde clasped as cordially.

Meanwhile the Frenchman was crying:

"*Ah! monsieur, you vill note deny me your name, vich Helene shall commend to ze saints in her prayers, and teach her little vones—if Heaven shall vouchsafe such gude gifts to crown our happiness—to lisp vis blessings!*"

Several laughed aloud, and even Felix Cornish smiled at the Frenchman's long look ahead in the matter of matrimonial contingencies; but Egbert said, gravely:

"You may know me as Egbert Stanhope."

At that name Long Jack started.

"Stanhope! Stanhope!" he mused. "Where have I known the name of Stanhope in connection with that face?"

But he gnawed his mustache, as if the memory eluded him.

"Mr. Stanhope," said Felix Cornish, extending his hand, "allow me to thank you for doing for my friend what could not perhaps have been done in any other way, by restoring to him the identical money with which he was to prosecute his unfortunate search. Whether it be successful, or still delusive, as in the past, you have at least made him perfectly happy for the time being."

"And it is a great boon to be perfectly happy," said Egbert, with something of cynicism, and more of sadness in his tone, as he accepted the proffered hand rather coldly. "But you make too much of a little matter. Allow me to bid you good-evening."

"*Ah, ciel!* hear him!—a little matter! Bote surely monsieur vill drink a bottelle of vine before taking his leave!" urged the Frenchman.

"No, thank you. I never drink wine," said Egbert, with a suppressed shudder.

"Never drinks wine!" mused Long Jack, who never let anything slip which might be of remotest importance. "Stanhope! Stanhope! And never drinks wine! He shudders. Did he ever drink wine? Is there an unpleasant association with wine in his past?"

But he saw Egbert withdraw with the question of identity yet unsolved.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HAND OF FATE.

WITH quickened heart-throbs Sibyl Cornish saw Egbert Stanhope approach.

She heard a rippling murmur of gladness at her side, and saw the pretty blonde spring forward to meet him with a radiant smile. She saw his face brighten, banishing the cloud of sadness, to give place to a look of ineffable tenderness; and noted the caress conveyed in the simple touch of his fingers on the hand with which his sister clung to his arm.

It struck Sibyl a little oddly that the gentleman should be gloved while the lady's hand was bare; yet his careful toilet seemed so much a part of himself that the impression vanished before the new emotions called forth by the sound of his voice in the single low-spoken word:

"Adele!"

As they passed Sibyl, the blonde flashed upon her a smile of proud gladness which called a responsive smile of sympathy to Miss Cornish's lips.

Following the direction of his sister's eyes, Egbert met the dark orbs of the brunette beauty fixed upon his face.

Adele felt him start, draw her arm more closely to his side, and hurry her forward. Her surprised and questioning gaze saw a flush mount to his temples and a frown of pain or vexation bend his brows.

"Why, Egbert, do you know her?" she asked, on the impulse.

"Know her? Whom?"

"The lady we have just passed."

"No—I do not know her—she is a perfect stranger to me."

He spoke disjointedly, with the iteration of one who wished to leave no room for further questioning.

When the door of her state-room had closed between them and strangers, she took his hat off and laid it in the berth. Then slipping her hands about his neck and interlacing the fingers, she raised on tiptoe and drew his troubled face down until she could kiss him.

Her lips framed no question, but her wistful eyes asked—oh, so pathetically!—to be taken into his confidence, and to be allowed to comfort him.

Egbert Stanhope brushed the fair hair off her temples, took the girlish face between his two palms, and gazed into her eyes until his own were suffused with tears—and hers, too, at sight of his. Then he gathered her sunny head close down over his heart, and kissed the threads of gold again and again and again, while his strong frame quivered in every nerve, and his breast labored mightily with sobs which were the more terrible by reason of the great though ineffectual strength exerted to repress them.

And she, who had never before witnessed such an outburst, was terrified, and clung to him, crying:

"Dear, dear Bertie! what is the matter? Tell me!—oh, tell me, my darling brother!"

But a strong man does not babble his grief, even to a heart overflowing with such gentle sympathy.

For perhaps thirty seconds Egbert struggled

for self-mastery; even so short an interval seeming an age to the startled girl. Then the tense muscles relaxed, he released his sister from that close embrace, and with a deep-drawn breath got himself again in hand.

"There! there! it is all over," he said. "I beg your pardon, dear, for frightening you with my nonsense. Now Richard is himself again!—eh, *petite?*"

He smiled at her with an attempt at pleasantry which was a wretched, a pathetic failure.

Looking into his face through the tears that yet glistened in her eyes and hung pendent from her long lashes, the heart of the girl was so wrung with pain that she cried:

"Oh, Bertie! Bertie!"

And thinking only how she could put into most forcible expression the great pity and love that burdened her heart, she caught up his hands and carried them to her lips.

With a half-smothered ejaculation, he snatched away his hand—his right hand!—and started back, his cheeks paling and his eyes dilating with unmistakable terror.

Startled and shocked, the girl shrunk away, gazing at him in wonder. Then her lip began to quiver with wounded sensibilities. Had the great outpouring of her heart been repulsed?

Egbert read her ingenuous face, which so faithfully registered every passing thought, and the reaction of relief made him fairly dizzy.

"My God!" he mused. "For one agonizing moment I thought that she knew or suspected—"

He shuddered in spite of himself.

But he hastened to take her in his arms and say:

"Forgive me again, darling; I am in a strange mood to-night. But never, never for an instant doubt that I appreciate your sympathizing love. What other brother has such sweet affection accorded him? Oh, my one treasure!" he cried, with a sudden excess of tenderness, "how could I—how could I—"

He checked himself, and released her. With a sad smile, he said:

"We are not getting on much better, are we? Come, pet, forget it all. Let us go out on the hurricane deck. The night must be delightful, if it has kept the promise of early evening. I will share your singing with the man in the moon."

He made a brave effort to assume the lightness of tone with which he was wont to address her, and with affectionate solicitude threw a fleecy cloud of lace—a pretty feminine device—about her head and shoulders, and took from the upper berth a Spanish lute of exquisite workmanship, yellow with age and worn with long use—an instrument selected for its wondrous mellow tone, and brought across the seas a gift to "sweet-voiced sister Adele!"—and so he led her through the lighted saloon out into the calm night.

The scene from the hurricane deck was tranquilizing and inspiring. The moon, at its full, was now half-way up to the zenith, shedding a pale luster over the sleeping landscape. From the boat to the eastern bank, where the woods lay a line of black shadow, stretched a pathway of shimmering silver. In the wake of the steamer were following billows of snowy foam, bounded by divergent lines of toppling wave-crests.

Just over the stern Egbert found Adele a seat, and sitting down at her feet, leaned his head against her knee.

The girl's fingers toying with the strings of her instrument, woke a few sweet chords, which shaped themselves into a prelude whose sadness showed the burden lying on her heart. Then out on the still air of the night went her voice in tones low and clear as the soft breathings of a flute. Like David of old, she was wooing her king from his melancholy by the magic of her voice.

The last sweet note died away, and singer and instrument were mute.

Looking into her brother's face, Adele saw that a dreamy calm had settled down upon his perturbed spirit. With her soft fingers she brushed the hair off his temple, kissed him there a zephyr-like caress, laid her cheek against the spot, and sat perfectly still.

They made a fair picture—the man of thirty-five, who already bore tokens of rude buffeting in the warfare of life, and the maiden of scarce seventeen, just beginning to peer with wondering eyes into the opening future.

Their sweet reverie was interrupted by a foot-fall and a voice.

"Ah! Monsieur Stanhope, I cry you pardon, if I intrude upon your moment of privacy. Bote a kindly Providence have brought to me

ze friends of long ago, whose magnanimity would make as a personal favor ze unparalleled generosity bestowed upon even so humble a friend as I. *Eh, bien!* vill you deny to my pupil, whose maiden lips lend a new charm to ze grammair dry-bone—*J'aime—tu aimes—il aime,* (I love, thou lovest, he loves)—*hal hal hal—parbleu!* eet must sound sweet from ze lips of ze voman grown! Can you deny to her ze ecstatic pleasshair to say zat she love her old master and shall share his gratitude? And her excellent parent, ze gracious Madame Corneesh, who vas attract by ze marvelous beaultie of ma'am'selle, ze sistair of monsieur! Ah! Monsieur Stanhope is so gallant, he cannot refuse—"

At the sound of M. Bourdoine's voice, both Egbert and Adele started up, to discover the Frenchman standing with his hand on his heart, and his form bent in a most deferential bow.

Egbert's first emotion was great annoyance; but as he gathered the drift of M. Bourdoine's purpose, he turned pale and compressed his lips with pain.

In that moment he might have rudely repelled the overtures of M. Bourdoine's friends; but the girl bent and whispered in his ear:

"Oh, do let them come, Bertie, dear! It is that beautiful lady with whom you saw me standing. When you were looking so grand, dear, she drew my attention to it of her own accord, not knowing that I was anything to you."

At that a wave of crimson swept up to Egbert's forehead, and his eye ranged the length of the boat and picked out the stately form of Sibyl, who had her hand extended, pointing out over the water. In the breast of our sad hero there was a terrible though silent struggle, which brought beads of sweat to his brow, and made his voice husky when he said, slowly:

"Monsieur Bourdoine, we shall count it an honor to know your friends. I beg you to feel that what I did for you is noteworthy only in this unexpected result."

When, after effusive thanks, the Frenchman turned briskly to seek his friends, Adele rewarded her brother with a kiss, but found him strangely unresponsive. Then she experienced her first misgivings. Yet she could not read his thoughts, nor did she catch that which half-shaped itself into words:

"It is the hand of Fate!"

Neither knew that at a little distance stood a man leaning against the guard, with his chin in his hand, watching them with a reflective frown and muttering:

"Stanhope! Stanhope! He shudders at the mention of wine! His sister is an angelic blonde and sings like a siren! Humpf! Stanhope! Stanhope!"

CHAPTER V.

A TERRIBLE DISASTER.

M. BOURDOINE'S delight at meeting Sibyl knew no bounds. He kissed her hand in his wildest ecstasies, calling her his idolized pupil, the brightness of whose smile an envious destiny had denied to his longing vision for years which seemed ages. In a breath he asked after her mother, blessed his patron saint for the happiness of this unexpected meeting, praised the glowing, womanly beauty of his quondam pupil, and poured into her ear all his sorrows and joys, adding a most extravagant eulogium on his deliverer from the depths of despair.

In the midst of all this, the party went in quest of Mrs. Cornish, when Felix espied Egbert and Adele leaving the saloon for the hurricane deck, and exclaimed:

"By Jove! sis, Monsieur Bourdoine's savior knows my little blonde divinity! There they go together."

"It is his sister," said Sibyl, quietly. "The deuce it is!" cried Felix. "In that case there is nothing for it but to cultivate him. Monsieur Bourdoine, we look to you to bridge over the gulf of conventionalities."

The Frenchman was delighted with the idea; but Mrs. Cornish when consulted, cried:

"A common gambler, Felix! I confess that I am surprised—"

"Mamma, he is *not* a common gambler!" cried Sibyl, with more warmth than she was aware, until recalled to herself by her mother's society stare of surprise, when she flushed in pretty confusion.

"No," laughed Felix. "I should call him an uncommon gambler!"

"But you have gambled yourself, Felix—and I, and mamma, too, in Baden-Baden," urged Sibyl.

"Ah! That was in Baden-Baden," replied

Felix, with mock gravity, having his sly fling at his mother's social ethics.

"But there's his sister—"

"True! true!" cried Felix, with genuine animation. "No man could be very objectionable with such a sister. My blonde divinity, you know, mother mine. You were rather struck with her yourself. Let me see—she resembles Countess—Countess—ah—I beg your pardon!"

"For shame, Felix!" whispered Sibyl, who saw his covert laugh.

But the chance resemblance fancied or real carried the day, and victory lay with Sibyl, Felix and M. Bourdoine, as opposed to Mrs. Cornish, representing blue-blood exclusiveness, and her patron saint, Mrs. Grundy.

The formality of introduction over, the Cornishes expressed their participation in the obligation of their friend M. Bourdoine.

The conversation then turned on themes suggested by the beauty of the night and the moonlit scenery.

Felix found his blonde divinity a very shy little puss, at first, but his off-hand frankness won her confidence, and he soon had her laughing merrily.

Then he begged for a song, which she conceded readily, and executed with unaffected grace.

Of course a promenade followed. Felix understood the cards in this little game full as well as Egbert understood poker.

As for Egbert himself, whatever the scruples that had led him to avoid Sibyl Cornish, he put them aside, and giving himself up to the full enjoyment of the moment, talked with a brilliancy which evidenced the cultured and well-informed gentleman. In half an hour Sibyl had forgotten everything else in the fascination of his conversation.

But now there appeared evidences of excitement on the boat. A number of passengers came out on the hurricane deck, and officers and men were seen to move about hurriedly.

The cause of this commotion was a dark-red cloud, appearing far astern above the tree-tops, which soon after rounded a bend, discovering beneath it the rows of twinkling lights which make up the spectacle of a Mississippi river steamboat as seen by night.

It does not come within the province of our story to describe in detail the incidents attending a steamboat race—the increasing excitement of passengers and officers of the boat alike, the spirit of gambling which betrayed persons of ordinarily staid habits into the most reckless betting, the fierce animosity springing up between the captains of the rival boats, as they ran side by side, and extending even to the passengers, leading to much profane recrimination, and almost to an exchange of pistol-shots.

But in the midst of the excitement came the legitimate result of criminal recklessness on the part of the managers of the boat. There was a terrific explosion, followed by the hiss and roar of escaping steam and the shivering of timbers, then the appalling cries of the wretched victims.

The forward part of the boat was blown to atoms, the debris of splintered timbers, of mutilated humanity rising high in the air, to fall back into the river and on the deck of the rival boat.

The after part of the hurricane-deck was raised and thrown over, with but little splintering, precipitating those upon it over the stern of the boat into the river.

Half-stunned by the shock, yet revived by the plunge into the cold water, Egbert Stanhope became conscious that he held something in his arms. The lights from the surviving steamboat showed him that it was Sibyl Cornish.

In her bewilderment and terror she clasped him about the neck with a strength that bade fair to strangle him, and despite his efforts he sunk beneath the turbid waters.

Then came the awful fight with death by drowning. There was a strange ringing in his ears, and his breast glowed as if it held a fiery furnace. When he involuntarily gasped for breath, the water rushed into his mouth as if eager to get at the seat of life.

As he came again to the surface he raised his hand, and with his open palm struck her fairly in the face, stunning her by the blow. It was the only salvation for both. Only then he succeeded in tearing her arms from about his neck.

He might have supported her then, but while he was yet gasping for breath and gathering his scattered wits he saw a yellow mass near him just sinking, and realized at a flash that it was his sister Adele's hair.

To snatch her from the embrace of death was the work of an instant. But in the effort his own head went under water again, and when

he once more reached the surface he was so exhausted as to be almost helpless.

Doubly burdened as he was, he could not long fight against the terrible sucking of the current, as the eddies sought to drag him down. The water was again to his lips when a voice cried:

"Let me help you!"

And he felt Adele lifted higher in the water, and drawn from his arm.

Turning almost blindly he saw Long Jack, who seemed in full vigor.

"For God's sake, save her!" aspirated Egbert, and then by a desperate effort he fought his way out of the reach of the waves that sought to strangle him and lifted Sibyl's face clear of the water.

For the time he could do no more than sustain himself and his unconscious burden, and that with difficulty, until his hand touched something hard; and a moment later he had drawn a piece of the wreck to him, and so floated, panting and trying to clear his lungs of water.

But there was one thought that had power to wake the sluggish currents of his blood, and send them tingling to his brain. He held her in his arms! He had saved her from death!

Whatever the future might hold in store, for that moment she was all his. And he held her close over his heart, and kissed her wan, unconscious face.

But his first duty was to seek assistance. He saw that the engines of the surviving boat had been reversed and her helm turned so as to bring her about; but her terrible impetus had carried her far below the ill-starred River Queen, in a long, sweeping curve. As she approached the wreck on her backward course she was far out of the line along which Egbert was drifting.

He cried aloud for help, but the roar of escaping steam, which was set free from her overtaxed boilers to prevent a second catastrophe, would have drowned a hundred voices; and he suffered the chagrin of being passed unnoticed.

Back over the water was a terrible scene. The river hull of the River Queen had filled and sunk in comparatively shoal water, leaving a portion of her shattered upper works above the surface. A number of poor wretches had managed to climb upon the wreck, to be again driven into the water by the flames, which had caught perhaps from the cook's range, and were now lighting up with lurid glare the scene of tragedy. The buffeting waves were dotted with struggling forms, which here and there threw their arms aloft with cries of despair and disappeared from sight. They were fortunate who found pieces of the wreck by which to buoy themselves up until they were reached by the boats sent to their rescue from the other steamer.

Egbert might have been among these, but while most were held by the counter-currents caused by the shoaling of the river, he had been caught by the rapidly-gliding waters of the deeper channel, along the edge of the bar, and was thus borne away from shore.

In his enfeebled condition he could not hope to make head against the current which sets from the banks of a river toward its center, and so work his way ashore. There was nothing but to wait until the boat had exhausted her labors at the wreck and resumed her course down the river.

Could he hold out so long? And if he survived, what of the unconscious Sibyl?

Oh! the untold agony of that moment!

"Sibyl! Sibyl!" he murmured, and sought to kiss her back to consciousness.

But her lips were cold and clammy, as if she were already dead, and he shuddered at contact with them.

Then he remembered that he had struck that still, white face, not in anger, but to save her life and his own, and yet he kissed it as a sort of mute petition for forgiveness. And he almost wished that her arms might again be so tightly clasped about his neck, if only he could feel that she was not dead.

But if she lived, could she ever be aught to him? With the thought his soul was again racked with pain, compared with which the outburst in Adele's presence was as nothing. Now he raised his gloved right hand out of the water, and gazed at it with such fiery tears as men seldom shed coursing down his cheeks. With white despair in its rigid lineaments, he raised his face to the calm night sky and cried:

"Oh! is there a just God?"

But the moon looked mutely down, as she has looked upon the anguish of untold myriads, and the deep heavens gave forth no answer.

CHAPTER VI.

LONG JACK'S LOVE.

It was natural that Mrs. Cornish should seize upon the nearest person for support; and, M. Bourdoine being as ignorant of the art of swimming as of the subtleties of poker, it was equally natural that he should clutch Mrs. Cornish. The two would doubtless have drowned each other, had not the strong arm of Long Jack dragged them upon a piece of the wreck.

He had no little difficulty in disembarassing himself of them; for both evinced a disposition to cling to him, M. Bourdoine filling up the intervals of coughing with a chaotic jumble of English and French. But, having got them seated on the wreck, Long Jack left them holding to each other, and was himself free to go to the rescue of Adele.

The gambler did not regain the raft which he had left. He was caught in the eddy which bore Egbert away, and carried some distance down the stream; but not being so much exhausted as the latter, he saw the danger and managed to swim back into the slower water.

Left alone with his unconscious burden, Long Jack could not but be struck by her exquisite beauty as revealed in the moonlight; and in that moment he conceived for her a passion which was perhaps the purest sentiment of his life, and yet the essential selfishness of which was destined to bring to her, and to those most dear to her, their greatest sorrow and their greatest joy.

The action of being lifted into the boat which soon came to their relief revived Adele so that she began to cough; and by the efforts of Long Jack she was soon restored to full consciousness and comparative comfort.

M. Bourdoine and Mrs. Cornish were picked up by the same boat, the latter for the nonce losing her fine-ladyism in weeping like an ordinary woman over the uncertainty which shrouded the fate of her children. Of Felix nothing was known, and of Sibyl only that she had the support of Egbert.

Here the tender heart of Adele found scope for its gentlest ministrations. Wrapping her arms about the stricken mother, she whispered words of hope into her ear, though a strange palsy seemed to seize upon every faculty of her own being when she thought of Felix—truly "the happy"—lying white and rigid in the bottom of the river, his hair partaking of the waving motion of the weeds that wrapped him about like cerements, and his glazed eyes insensible to the impurities that lodged in them! Was their laughing light forever extinguished? she asked her heart; and the mother wondered at the closeness of her clinging embrace, and the tremor that shook her frame, and the sobs that broke her murmuring utterance.

On reaching the steamer Long Jack and M. Bourdoine went to look for Felix and Sibyl and Egbert among those who had already been brought on board, and failing to find them, watched each incoming boat, until at last one brought Felix.

He was unconscious, and those who brought him said that he had fainted on being dragged from the water, where he was sustaining himself with difficulty. The water which dripped from his garments was red with blood, and subsequent examination proved that his leg had been broken and severely lacerated, doubtless by a splinter of the riven deck.

His mother could not be kept away from him, but at the sight of blood fainted, and was revived only to go into violent hysterics. But a gentle hand was not wanting, though in that time, when so many demanded attention, and so few could give it, he must have been neglected but for Adele. Her pale yet resolute face was the first on which his eyes opened. Her hands chafed his temples and held water to his lips.

But her moment of keenest anguish came when she learned that the boat had resumed her way and Egbert was not yet found. Then she forgot every one and everything else in a dumb despair that was terrible to witness. She did not cry out; she shed no tears; she only panted and wrung her hands and looked helplessly from one to another.

Long Jack told her that there was one hope left. They might overtake him further down the stream whither he had been borne by the rapid current.

Adele took the hand of the man who had saved her life and who gave her the only hope of her brother's safety, and, forgetful of Felix, dragged him off toward the bow of the boat, where she made him watch on one side, while she watched on the other; but all the while she clung to his hand, as if it were her only stay.

Long Jack was touched by the exquisite pa-

thos of her grief and by her clinging trust in him. All that was best in his nature, too, was stirred into new activity. Was it possible that he could win the love of this pure girl? What if Egbert were drowned? Could he in a measure take his place as her protector, and so win his way to her heart?

The gambler began to look back upon his reckless and vicious life with the most poignant regrets he had ever experienced, and to plan anew for the future.

But Long Jack's story of Egbert and Sibyl had passed from lip to lip, and there were scores of eyes watching from every part of the boat that they might not be passed. The engines had been slowed down until the steamer gained but little on the current, and out over the river on either side the rescuing boats were rowed down the stream all abreast, so that it would be impossible to pass them, if they were still afloat.

From time to time lusty lungs called forth the name:

"STANHOPE!"

After calling they waited and listened.

Presently a faint sound came over the water. Then a wild cheer went up from one of the boats, the rowers bent their oars until they nearly snapped, and the boat leaped forward. All the other boats turned toward the same point and went skimming over the water.

The glad cry was caught up by the watchers on the steamboat, until the lamentations of those who bewailed the loss of friends and the groans of those who writhed in physical anguish were drowned by a sound of rejoicing. But she whose heart had leaped with the wildest thrill of delight and thanksgiving hung fainting in Long Jack's arms.

Remembering the instinctive antagonism between himself and her brother, Long Jack turned sick with dread. In that instant, if by an effort of the will he could have made Egbert sink before the rescuing boat reached him, would he have willed it?

But Egbert did not sink. Eager hands seized him and held him, while others lifted the burden from his stiffened arms into the boat. Then he was dragged over the side, and the little fleet of skiffs waited for the steamboat to come up.

M. Bourdoine, who had been waiting upon Mrs. Cornish (her maid being among the lost) alternately handing her her bottle of smelling-salts and receiving it from her, in keeping with the ebb and flow of her emotions, and running hither and thither for water, or information, or whatever else she imagined she wanted—M. Bourdoine, hearing the shout, came forward, and, being a little man, he of course felt it incumbent on him to relieve six-foot Jack of his burden.

Long Jack paid no heed to him, nor to his polyglot ejaculations, further than to elbow him out of the way, while he laid Adele down so that the blood could go to her head, and whipped her palms with his so smartly that he brought her to in a trice.

As soon as she was herself again she pointed down to the wood-deck, where the boats would be received on board the steamer, and said:

"Take me down there. I want to be the first to receive him."

Of course she started to go herself, and equally, of course, what with her exposure and fainting and all, she was weak, and her steps were poor, tottering things that would have failed her in the hurrying crowd. Then Jack did what was a very sensible thing to do, considering his amatory aspirations—he picked the frail little beauty up in his arms, and elbowing aside all obstructing humanity, hurried with her down the broad stairway leading from the cabin-deck to the wood-deck.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GRAND SULTAN.

FIRST they handed up the unconscious Sibyl. Adele gave her but a passing notice. She was only a woman, you know!

But when the king came up, supported on either side by lusty roustabouts, and looking pale, and weak, and everything else that was calculated to make him a suitable subject on which to lavish an ocean of love and solicitude and all the rest of it—then didn't she fairly hurl herself upon him, and almost squeeze the breath out of his body, and smother him with kisses, and baptize him anew with tears, and manifest her delight with bubbling laughter, and cooing epithets of endearment? And didn't she insist on supporting him on one side, and walk beside him with her arm about him, deluding herself with the thought that she was holding him! though, poor soul, her weak limbs trembled so

beneath her light weight that she almost had to cling to him to keep from sinking.

Well, they got the rescued man into a berth and installed her as chief nurse. But the minute he got her alone he took her hands between his and said:

"Adele, go to her—I shall get along well enough—and, if you love me, do not let her want for any care you can bestow. Don't let her die, dear!—don't let her die!"

And Adele saw all the intense passion held under such strong restraint, yet forcing its way to the surface in that appeal; and into her eyes came a great wonder and delight. After all the melancholy years had he at last found that which would assuage his secret sorrow?

He could not bear her look, but turning his face into the pillow, and putting her hands away, said:

"Go! Go!"

And she did go, having kissed him, and thrown all the melting tenderness of her soul into the caress. And in her eyes was a new light, and in her heart a new love for the woman he loved. Henceforth Sibyl Cornish would share the love she had hitherto given solely to her idolized brother.

And Egbert, lying alone, and remembering when in his anguish and desolation of heart he had cried: "Is there a just God?" now asked himself:

"With such a love, have I a right to complain? Dear sister, have I failed to appreciate the boon of your devotion?"

Meanwhile, M. Bourdoine had received his unconscious pupil with exclamatory grief. Trotting beside Long Jack, he had held her limp hand, raining tears and kisses upon it, apostrophizing all the saints in the calendar, and calling on them to look upon the piteous spectacle, and to take compassion on her youth and beauty.

Soon they had her in a state-room, and M. Bourdoine, being a terrible male creature, was excluded; but he hung about the door, besieging every one who went in or out; and so Adele found him.

"Ah! grace a Dieu! Ma'am'selle Adele!" he cried, catching her hands, "ze gracious saints have hearkened to ze prayer of vone humble suppliant! She lives!—my pupil lives! ze light, ze beautie is note blotted from our firmament!"

"Do you think she stopped to discuss the matter? Not she! With a flash of gladness at M. Bourdoine, as a reward for his good news, she vanished through the door of that state-room as noiselessly as a sprite. Nor did she heed the hurried admonition of the impromptu nurse in attendance, but instantly possessed herself of the white hand, and bending over kissed the pale lips of the woman whom Egbert loved! and cooed:

"My dear, I should like to hug you, if my clothes were not all wet. Thank God! we are all safe!"

And then, being a woman, and hence, of course, a natural matchmaker, she whispered:

"He's worried to death about you, and sent me to take care of you. The dear fellows have no idea how much killing we can stand, do they? And shall I run and tell him you are in riotous good health? He begged me not to let you die, you know."

Sibyl had not known it, but she was evidently glad to be informed, for a faint flush came into her wan cheeks.

"Thank him," she began; but Adele stopped her with a kiss.

"No, no! you must do that yourself. Can I do anything for you? No! Then I'm off. Good-by, dear."

Back to Egbert, and, teasingly:

"She's well enough to blush rosy red when I told her what a foolish boy you were. La! what a coincidence! Why, you're blushing, too! That I should ever live to see my self-possessed brother blush like a school-boy!"

She laughed at him mercilessly. But he could stand it. For the time such gladness flooded his soul that the cloud, to its last vestige, was vanished.

But then a pang of remorse smote Adele's heart, and the brightness that came into Egbert's face seemed to have been transmitted from hers.

Along the floor of the cabin were ranged mattresses, on which were stretched the poor wretches who had been sacrificed to the Moloch of steamboat-racing. Some were maimed and torn by splintering wood; some lay in a ghastly stupor from internal injuries; some writhed in anguish, horribly scalded by escaping steam.

Among the unfortunates lay Felix Cornish, bearing mental as well as physical pain with compressed lips, like a hero.

Long Jack had saved Adele Stanhope's life,

when Felix would have given his other leg for the privilege. The sufferer had noted the expression of trust with which Adele had taken Jack's hand when she led him off to look for Egbert. Felix would have thrown in an arm along with both legs to have her rely on him like that. Later Jack appeared bearing Felix's own sister in his arms, and behind him Egbert walked feebly, encircled by the arm of the overjoyed Adele, to have had whom embrace him, and look so lovingly into his face, poor Felix would have given both arms and both legs.

While he was rejoicing at this assurance of his sister's rescue, Felix could not help feeling that all the luck fell to Jack while he lay there helpless and deserted.

In the midst of his repinings, a pretty fairy, with a face of remorseful compassion, flitted to his side; and then Felix was happy again. He never took his eyes from her face while she beat up his pillow and made it lie as light as swan's down. When she took her hand away, he turned his head so that his lips brushed the soft pink palm—the merest accident in the world!

Of course she never noticed that; only she was busy for a minute about something which necessitated the turning away of her face so that Felix could not see it. But she was sweetly unconscious when she told him about his mother and Sibyl, and Egbert, and even M. Bourdoine.

Then Felix, to whom the mere sound of her voice was become a luxury, practiced a very commendable piece of self-denial.

"We're a sadly selfish lot, I'm afraid," he said. "Here we have all been accepting your generous services as a matter of course, instead of insisting on your immediately seeking a change of clothing. You will take cold in those wet garments, and then I shall never forgive myself."

Did not it make her eyes sparkle that he should be the first to think of her comfort! And leaving Felix to think how exquisitely pure blondes blush, she straightway performed her first act of obedience to him.

Well, in due time the boat reached Memphis, and Felix was carefully moved to his suburban villa overlooking the broad Mississippi.

The excitement being past, reaction set in, and Adele was now thoroughly prostrated. Of course Felix would hear to nothing but that she should be taken to his home. Egbert, with his objections, was in hopeless minority.

M. Bourdoine was to make the home of his old pupil his head-quarters while prosecuting his search in that vicinity.

Finally, Mrs. Cornish, who had swallowed (figuratively) a man who had shown that he could gamble, could not utterly ignore a man who did gamble, professionally, the same having saved her life; and Long Jack was given to understand, in the phraseology of ordinary civility, that he would be well received whenever he chose to honor Riverside with his company. Of course Long Jack understood that, but having an end of his own to attain, he accepted the invitation literally, and rode out on horseback after an interval of just two days.

Perhaps it was due to the vivifying properties of country air, perhaps to something else, but after one long night's rest at Riverside Adele rose as fresh as a buttercup. Ordinary return for hospitality extended would determine that she should share with Sibyl the duty of attendance on the sick man, who lay in the room just off the library. On the other hand, while Mrs. Cornish was recovering from the shock her nerves had sustained, and Felix was disabled, the entertainment of their guest devolved wholly upon Sibyl. So it came to pass that while Sibyl was showing Egbert the grounds, or making as respectable an opponent as might be at billiards, Adele was reading or singing to Felix, or bathing his fevered temples with the tenderest fingers in the world—a very nice arrangement indeed, since it proved eminently satisfactory to all the parties concerned.

So matters stood when Felix became convalescent, so that he could be wheeled into the library, to recline among the cushions of his invalid's chair, looking for all the world, in his dressing-gown and smoking-cap, like some luxurious old—or, rather, young sultan. There he would lie by the hour, having his lightest commands executed by the veriest slave to his caprice. And every graceful movement of her lithe figure was followed by his lazy eyes, the rogue expressing unnecessary wants just for the luxurious pleasure of seeing her walk across the room.

Then the amatory deities treated Felix very handsomely, though he did not see it in that light at the time. They persuaded Mrs. Cornish that she had one of her bilious attacks, which is as good a name as any for hypochondria result-

ing from fashionable inactivity. It was now her turn to have Adele to read and sing to her, and poor Felix "had his nose put out of joint," as the children say.

Solitaire and dummy whist had no charms; reading was a bore; and even his meerschaum lost its attractiveness, Adele not being by to go over that little fiction about tobacco-smoke being agreeable to her, when in truth and verity she nearly died of suppressed inclination to cough.

But the result was that while she was gone his fancy tenanted her vacant chair with a phantom quite as angelic as the original, and into Mrs. Cornish's room would stalk a sultan, invisible to ordinary sight, and obtrude his melancholy face between Adele's eyes and the page she was reading. When she came down to him at last his face would light up with such evident pleasure it made her blush, which enhanced her beauty; and contrasting the happy smile of the attended sultan with the forlorn ruefulness of the deserted phantom, she pitied him immensely, and made up to him in the quality of her attentions what he lost in quantity.

So it came to pass that one day, when she was arranging his pillow, he put out his arm unexpectedly and drew her down upon the arm of his invalid-chair.

Of course she cried, in a hushed, scared voice: "Oh! let me go, please!"

And equally of course she struggled, just a little, to get away. But when she found that her weakness availed nothing against his strength, and that he was drawing her closer and closer, laughing at her confusion, then she got faint and trembly, and sunk all aflutter into his arms.

From that interview she bore away no very clear recollection of what Felix had said or what she had replied; only it was there that she conceived the idea that heaven must be love-making made perpetual, with no "ma'ying or giving in marriage" to spoil every thing!

When they were interrupted by footsteps she ran away very much flustered and with her blonde hair tumbled about, and ringing in her ears the terrible words that Felix "meant to have it out with Stanhope that evening over the cribbage-board."

Of course she had a "good cry" all by herself, which needs no description; but how Felix "had it out with Stanhope" was a more complicated matter, and must be assigned to a new chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

FELIX "HAS IT OUT WITH STANHOPE."

By this time Felix was so far improved that he made his appearance regularly in the dining-room, being usually supported thither on the one side by Egbert and on the other by Adele. But on the day of the remarkable interview recounted in the last chapter, Adele, instead of appearing in person, sent her excuses, and that she would content herself with a little toast and tea in her room, and retire early.

Egbert looked up with a quick anxiety which did not escape Sibyl. Of late very little that he said or did passed unnoticed by her.

"Is Adele unwell?" he now asked.

"I will go and see what is the matter," volunteered Sibyl.

But Felix interposed.

"Don't trouble yourself, sis. She was here only a few minutes ago; and if I am any judge, all she needs is a little letting-alone."

"Come, old fellow," addressing Egbert, briskly, "we can't let our appetites wait on the caprices of anything so variable as a woman. We must wink at their whims, and in return the dear creatures indulge us in our pet selfishnesses."

Being out of Egbert's range of vision, he frowned hard at Sibyl, who was looking at him, put his finger on his lips, to imply that "mum was the word," and smiled knowingly.

Now Sibyl, being a woman, had had her eyes open, so that she was in a measure prepared with the key which would unlock the mystery of this pantomime. She turned away to ring the bell and order the immediate service of dinner, just in time to hide the swift flash that sprang to her eyes and the soft flush that mantled her cheek; and with the babe-like innocence with which the Lords of Creation are so often deceived by their subtle rulers, she said:

"Oh, well! every woman has moments when she don't want to be teased even by her best friends. If they are wise, they let her have her way. So, if you are ready, we will go right down."

Of course Egbert's anxiety was allayed by so high an authority; and he wheeled about, to see

Felix looking as if he meditated nothing more ethereal than lamb with caper sauce. He did not prove so much of a *gourmand*, however, as to grudge time to talk, and his unusual flow of spirits compensated in a measure for Adele's absence.

When they had returned to the library, and the cribbage-board was set with its pegs in the end-holes, Sibyl suggested that, lacking Adele, Mrs. Cornish might find the company of her own daughter agreeable; and the gentlemen were left alone.

And now, for the first time, Felix began to experience a feeling of extreme awkwardness and diffidence. He had never before been so struck by the sad gravity of Egbert's face when at rest. There was not more than ten years' difference in their ages, and yet the lover felt the bashfulness of a boy in the presence of a sedate man.

"Confound the subject!" he mused, when they had sat for some time in silence! "Is there no way to introduce it—gradually, now, would be the way, according to my notion. I don't want to knock him down with the proposal without any warning. How infernally unconscious he sits there, while I'm all afire."

Then he found audible speech.

"Ahem! By the way, Stanhope, how do you find Riverside?"

"It is a noble estate, of which any man might feel proud. If I did not love my own home on the Ohio so well, I should envy you this beautiful prospect over the Mississippi. Now that it is suggested, I shall count upon you as my guest during the coming summer."

"Ah—yes—of course," replied Felix, abstractedly. He was musing: "Thunder and Mars! what has this got to do with Adele? I can't very well say that we should like to spend our honeymoon on the Ohio. That would be getting the cart before—"

But here the quiet look of surprise on Egbert's face recalled him to a sense of his somewhat informal acceptance of the invitation so courteously extended.

"Oh! I beg your pardon! Yes; I can answer for both my mother and Sibyl. We will all be delighted to visit your Northern home. I only regret that this accident has laid me so effectually on the shelf that I haven't been able to make your stay here more pleasant. But as soon as I get on my legs I'll show you some of the country."

"I owe no slight debt to your sister in that direction. In our horseback rides I believe that there is scarcely a spot within ten miles that has escaped us."

"Hanged if the thing ain't working itself out!" was Felix's delighted reflection. "Here's an opening right to my hand!"

So overjoyed was he at the prospect that his face brightened radiantly and he burst forth:

"We're quits there, old fellow! While you were taking brake and brae with Sibyl, what should I have done with this confounded game leg, if it hadn't been for Adele—ah—ahem!—ah—that is, your sister—ah—Miss Stanhope!"

Felix was a hopeless wreck. He had run plump into the ditch, and his floundering was simply amazing, as Egbert's blank stare showed. Had he let well enough alone, the mere use of Adele's name might have passed unnoticed, just as the proverbial bull in a china-shop would make no havoc as long as he stood still. It is only when he indulges in ground and lofty tumbling that the crockery begins to fly.

"Hang it all, Stanhope!" cried poor Felix, throwing down his cards and getting very red in the face, "I wasn't cut out for a diplomatist, because I never could slide into anything gracefully. I always go up-stairs two at a time, and eat as if there were only 'twenty minutes for refreshments,' and make a confounded muddle of everything where anybody else would use tact, and have it all straight and smooth. Blest if I don't think it's in the blood!"

"Well, I thought that for once in my life I had things fixed; and here I've gone and tumbled head over heels into the midst of the puddle. The long and short of the whole business is this: I've had your sister, Adele, at my elbow day after day, and she's treated me just like an angel. And I'd have been a wooden man if I hadn't fallen in love with her. But, for that matter, I was gone long before we soared skyward from the deck of the River Queen—"

But the cards had fallen from Egbert's hand, and he had risen out of his chair, looking so white and strange that Felix came to a full stop, and began again in a totally different tone of voice:

"Hallo, old fellow! What the deuce is the matter! I'm not a Blue Beard, nor an ogre,

that you need look so dismayed. Zounds, man! it's not a criminal offense to fall in love with a pretty woman!"

"No," said Elegant Egbert, as if Felix had stated a most ordinary proposition, and he wished to express his acquiescence in its soundness. But at the words *criminal offense* he had winced as if stung.

"Well," resumed Felix, with an attempt at lightness, "you see, as you seemed to stand in some degree in the position of the stern parent, you know, why, I thought it was the proper thing to tell you how the wind lay, and get your consent and blessing, and all that sort of thing."

"Ah!" said Egbert, in a constrained, husky voice. "And you have spoken to her about this?"

"Spoken to her!" cried Felix, in amaze. "What do you take me for? Why, of course I have spoken to her about it!"

"What did she say?"

"Deuced cool and catechetical!" thought the bewildered Felix. "Blest if I don't feel as if I was up before my old schoolmaster, after a midnight visit to the orchard!"

But aloud he said:

"Well, as for that, I don't know as I could repeat just what she said; but I know that it was enough so that it left no reason for me to envy the archangels. What more do you want than that?"

Egbert steadied himself by placing his hand on the back of his chair, where it shook perceptibly.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Cornish," he began, as if the words choked him, when Felix interrupted:

"Look here, Mr. Stanhope! if the pinch is in the pocket-book, I think I can show you an estate free from incumbrance and backed up by cash and collateral that will satisfy you, if you are as reasonable a man as I take you to be. On the score of character I can refer you to a thousand of the best men in the Mississippi valley, and to thousands more all over the State of Virginia, where the Cornishes have been known with honor for a hundred and fifty years."

Here was the first touch of pride that Felix had evinced since our acquaintance with him. Now he had risen to his feet, supporting himself by the table. There was nothing of his mother's petty pride of social position; but he stood erect with his head thrown back, pale to the lips and with eyes flashing. The whole man said:

"We have been honorable men!"

Egbert raised his hand to stay the other's rapid words.

"It is not that," he began.

But the impetus of the excited man carried him to the end of what was marked down in his thoughts.

"I have taken you on trust. I have none of the detective spirit, and should never think of questioning you, when I have you bodily before my eyes to form my judgment from. But I do not ask you to risk your sister's happiness on any uncertainty."

He would have bitten his tongue out before he would have intimated that the thought was in his mind that he had taken Adele, too, on trust. In fact, it was not there. So perfect was his confidence in her that it never occurred to him that she was necessarily so inseparably involved with her brother in this regard that his words might apply to her with equal force.

But Egbert's thought supplied the link, and the words fell upon him with crushing force.

"Stop! stop! I beg of you! It is not for me, Heaven knows, to require a certificate of character from you!" he said with a humility that left Felix open-mouthed with bewilderment. "I cannot be too careful of her. She is all I have in the world to love."

He paused, seeming to choke with emotion, and his aspect was so utterly wretched and forlorn that Felix pitied him, not being clear as to what it all meant, more than he had ever pitied any human being before. But Egbert almost immediately resumed:

"But nothing was more foreign to my thoughts than any sordid considerations, and of your character as a man I am satisfied from what I have seen of you. Perhaps I ought to have been prepared for this, but—but it has taken me so—unawares."

His eyes, which had been resting on the carpet, now began to wander about the room, as if he were seeking some avenue of escape from a sense of oppressiveness, and he put his hand to his head.

"My friend," he said, suddenly turning his eyes to Felix's face, in a sort of weary pleading, "will you do me a favor? Will you let this matter rest just here until—until—I am

not feeling well. Let me take the air a minute."

And leaving Felix to stare after him, open-mouthed, he turned and hurried out of the room, murmuring to himself:

"Adele! Adele!"

Felix heard the front door clang. Then his feelings found vent in a very forcible expletive, after which he sunk back into his chair and thought.

"Well," he exclaimed, presently, "this interview presents features which are somewhat peculiar. Stanhope never showed signs of mental aberration before; but what is all this row about?"

But nothing came of his cogitations; and though he waited until eleven o'clock, Egbert did not return. Then, being a man, the puzzled lover went to bed to await the issue of the morrow.

When he dropped off to sleep, Felix did not feel sure whether he had "had it out with Stanhope" or not; but on one point he was perfectly clear—he was determined to have the girl, her excellent brother *volens volens*. Therefore there was nothing to disturb his repose.

CHAPTER IX.

A FALSE INTERPRETATION.

SIBYL stood before Adele's door.

"Won't you let me in, dear?" she pleaded through the wooden barrier.

The door swung open, discovering Adele with her hair flowing about in waves of sunlit gold, an unmistakable redness about the eyes, and just a suspicion of the rubicund at the end of the nose. In look and attitude there was that shy pleading which gave to her an air almost infantile and altogether angelic. How was this proud brunette beauty going to take the capture of her big brother's heart by a little midget of a blonde?

The answer came up on her with a swoop; and before she had time to take breath Sibyl had caught her in her arms and was smothering her with kisses, and scolding her in that cooing fashion which means just the opposite of what is said.

Of course they cried together, laughing all the while, and when Sibyl held Adele at arm's length to look at her, with a sort of amatory cannibalism in her eyes, the little culprit blushed fiery red, and was immediately clutched again and held with her face in Sibyl's bosom until she narrowly escaped Desdemona's interesting fate.

Well, Sibyl was devoured with curiosity until Adele had told her all about it. Then they discussed it in all its bearings. They wondered how long it would take Felix to "have it out with Stanhope," and how he would go about it. The idea of making a game of cribbage subsidiary to a negotiation of that character! Well! men were strange creatures, to be sure!

A subject so vast and so many-sided could not be gone over all in a breath; and then the impending relationship of sisterhood was so novel and so altogether delightful that they must have a foretaste of its sweets; so Sibyl found it impossible to leave Adele that night. And when the moon got round so that it could look in at the west windows (which was sometime after midnight, however) it witnessed a picture which would have warmed the hearts of gods and men.

Clasped in each other's arms, so that the threads of gold intermingled lovingly with the ebony floss, lay the two fair creatures wrapped in peaceful sleep—sleep, which lends to innocence and beauty its most ethereal charm, and shows moral and physical deformity in its most hideous aspect.

But the morning brought its cloud. Sibyl made her appearance in the library, with a puzzled look on her face and in her hand a note.

"What is this, Felix?" she asked. "This note has been handed to me, from Mr. Stanhope, to the effect that he has gone for a ride, and if he is not back in time for dinner, we are not to wait."

Adele looked surprised and then anxious.

Felix tried to look unconscious and unconcerned. Just then he was thinking thoughts that, in the presence of the ladies, were as well left unrealized.

"Why, I don't know," he said, taking the note and reading it. "Did he leave no further word than this? When did he go?"

To settle this point the servants were brought into requisition, which developed the following facts: Egbert's bed had not been occupied during the night; just about daybreak he had come to the stables, looking much disturbed, ordered saddled the horse that had been placed at his

disposal, and ridden away, the hostler said, "as if the devil and all was after him."

Having culled these facts, the three were left gazing into one another's faces, Adele instinctively drawing near to the side of the man whom her heart had selected henceforth to be her protector.

"Felix," she said, in a low tone, causing his heart to thrill at the sound of his name for the first time on her lips, "has this anything to do with your interview of last night? What did he say?"

Now the whole situation seemed to Felix without rhyme or reason. Moreover, the man who had lost his presence of mind before one of his own sex stood no chance whatever between those two dear creatures who stood looking at him with their great liquid eyes. They had him in a corner, from which poor Felix could see no possible way of escape except straight across the flower-beds. So putting on his heaviest top-boots (metaphorically speaking) he plunged forward to this effect:

"He acted just like a confounded idiot—"

And here the luckless fellow checked himself, flushing more deeply with mortification than he had before with anger.

With instinctive delicacy he reached out his hand and put it on Adele's, and then went on with an honesty which must have won any one's forgiveness:

"I don't want to call names, little woman—most of all your brother. But I feel as if he hadn't treated me very handsomely. If he's got anything to say, why don't he say it, without so much hemming and hawing that nobody can understand? Then you'd know how to take him."

"Well, but what *did* he say?" interposed Sibyl, to whose comprehension her brother was "rapidly making things no clearer."

"Why, he said he didn't care anything about the money, and I was a clever fellow enough, but he begged my pardon, and he wasn't feeling well, and would I let the matter rest while he took the air."

The ladies looked at one another blankly. Either Felix's summary was very fragmentary, or that interview must have been a very strange one.

But before any comment could be made, Felix seized Adele by the wrist, and drawing her close to his side so that he could pass his arm about her waist, said:

"See here, my little beauty! One thing, at least, is settled and sealed—I am bound to have you, if the dev— I beg your pardon again for my unfortunate choice of expression," cried the almost distracted lover. "But what I mean to say is, brother or no brother, I'm going to have you all the same!"

She thought that he was "just splendid" to be so hotly determined to possess her, though of course it was rank heresy for her to dream of opposing Egbert's will. If it came to a real issue between them—which Heaven forbid!—perhaps she would stand passive and let the best man win, like the knights of old!

"Confound him! he can't expect to have you all to himself forever, if you *are* the only thing he has to love. By the way, that was the prettiest and most sensible thing (one way of looking at it) that he said during the whole conversation."

"Oh!" exclaimed both ladies in chorus, drawing the same inference from Felix's chance words.

Their eyes met like a flash, and by another curious coincidence they both blushed.

"Is that the solution?" cried Sibyl.

"Oh, you stupid fellow!" cried Adele. "And to think you should give us the key by accident, after puzzling us with such irrelevant matter!"

"What is there to 'oh!' about?" asked Felix, a little impatiently. "And if the thing's clear to you, I assure you it's the pitchiest of pitch to me."

But Adele was sobbing on his shoulder, and murmuring something about "poor, dear Egbert!" while Sibyl had turned away, and was trying to bring the color back into her face, whence it had fled, leaving her pale to the lips.

"I await enlightenment from your superior powers of penetration," said Felix, with the air of a martyr.

"Felix," breathed his lady-love in his ear, "aren't you touched that my brother's great love for me makes it so hard for him to give me up to another, however much he may esteem him?"

"Is that what's the matter with him?" cried Felix, not overflowing with sympathy. "Well, I trust that I love sis, over there, as a brother should; but when the right man comes along I sha'n't act like a lunk—Ah—um—that is to

say, I'll tell him: 'Go in old fellow! You're welcome to all the love she'll give you. I know you can't cut me out.' Ain't that right, Sib?"

At that Sibyl took possession of the other side of him, opposite to Adele, and assured him that he was the best brother in the world, and that nobody ever could, would, or should "cut him out" of her affection.

After that every one was much relieved. If this was the only opposition to his suit, Felix expressed himself confident that "Stanhope would weather it," while Adele built up a Utopian scheme, in which they were all to live together, forming one happy family, so that Egbert could have her just the same as he always had, and Felix could have her, too.

The day was got through much better than the promise of the morning. Adele's happiness was tempered by her sympathy and anxiety for her brother. Felix put that curb of decency upon himself which he would have employed had he been attending the funeral of a member of his club with whom he had but a slight acquaintance. Sibyl was abstracted, and rather inclined to start at unexpected sounds.

When the night set in without bringing Egbert's return, both ladies became restless, and about nine o'clock the sound of a horse's hoofs coming up the drive-way made them both almost hysterical.

Perhaps two minutes of suspense were allowed to pass. Then, while Sibyl moved restlessly from place to place, wringing her hands and almost sobbing when she was where Felix could not see her, Adele, whose relationship warranted it, threw a light scarf over her head and ran down to the stables.

"Wasn't that Mr. Stanhope returned?" she asked the hostler.

"Yes, missy," was the reply, as short as pie-crust.

"And where is he? He has not come to the house."

"Dunno, missy. Reckon he's ober yander, some'r's," pointing with his thumb over his shoulder. "Stid o' goin' to'ards de house, he went to'ards de ribber gyarden."

Without more words Adele hastened in the direction indicated, and the hostler was left in sole possession of his domains, muttering to himself:

"Dunno whah he is, an', what's moah, I don't keer. All I know is, it's ten to one ef he hain't done gone ruined dat ah bay mare. Jist look a' her!—stan'in' dah all of a lather, an' tremblin' in every jint! He's from the Noah, he is! No 'count, nohow! Reckon, now, he tink's hosses is made o' iron, or somefin' or udder!"

Meanwhile Adele had gained a garden, far enough from the house to be secluded, on a slope overlooking the Mississippi, and there in the moonlight she came upon Egbert, looking the wreck of his wonted self.

A cry:

"Oh, Bertie! My darling, darling brother!"

And she precipitated herself upon his breast, clinging to him and sobbing as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER X.

THE MEASURE OF SISTER-LOVE.

WHEN Egbert Stanhope left the presence of Felix Cornish he was almost beside himself with pain. Out across the moonlit lawn to the river garden he strode, with the instinct which leads a wounded animal to seek solitude. And there while the lover laid aside his perplexity until he should have had his repose, and the fair young girls wandered hand in hand through the vernal pastures of dreamland, this man walked the night through, wringing his hands and moaning.

"Adele! Adele! my one darling!" was the burden of his grief, "is the blight of my life about to fall upon you? Oh! dearest, I have been blind! blind! that I never foresaw this! Better had I put mountains and seas between us! Rather had I banished myself from your side forever! Now every smile, every caress that you have given me is a separate stab."

"I, who should have so guarded you with my love that the winds of heaven might not blow upon you too roughly—I have betrayed the trust our dead mother reposed in me—I have blindly, selfishly let you minister to my plague-stricken life, until you have imbibed its foul contagion!"

"Adele! Adele! it was not that I did not love you, dear!"

His head sunk upon his breast, and he covered his face with his hands, overcome by the poignancy of his grief.

So until his breast was shaken by a terrible rare. Then, with clenched hands and stern

face raised to heaven, he cried through his set teeth:

"Oh! why do I live? Others die all about me, clinging frantically to this hollow mockery, this fiend's jest which they call life, while I—who have walked carelessly amid pitfalls of destruction—I who have faced death a score of times, shaken my fist in his face and braved his stroke—I am left to cumber the earth, a curse to myself and to her! Of the hundred set free the other night on the river, to whom would oblivion have been such a boon as to me?"

Later he tore the glove from his right hand, held it so that the moonlight streamed full upon it, and gazed at it while a dozen phases of emotion followed each other through his tortured soul. At the last he laughed with blood-curdling irony, and cried aloud:

"Oh, man! behold thy humanity! Oh, God! look upon thine infinite justice!"

So the night passed, and before the sun had brought the light and gladness of a new day he was coursing madly across the country on horseback.

The sun was already past the meridian when he got scant refreshment at a farm-house, and turned to retrace his steps. But when he had reached the house, he was as loth to meet those who awaited him within, and as ill prepared, as he had been in the morning.

With that dread upon him, he again sought the river garden, whither Adele followed him, to precipitate herself upon his breast, crying:

"Oh, Bertie! My darling, darling brother!"

With a great quivering cry he clasped her close in his arms, and bent until his cheek rested against hers. His mind had been full of her so long that he forgot that she was not in possession of facts which were so painfully familiar to him, and therefore could not share his feelings or understand his allusion; so his first words were:

"Oh! my precious one, can you ever forgive me?"

And she, answering from her own standpoint, replied:

"Forgive you? For what? For loving me so much? Did it pain you so, dear, to give me up to another? But I will love you just the same—more, if possible, now that I know how you need me. You know that nobody, however near they might be to me, could take my brother Bertie's place. Why, Felix is willing—he's glad to have it so—that we should all live together, so that you can have me just as much as ever. He isn't jealous one bit, though I told him that, if he didn't let me love you just the same, I should hate him. He said he'd subscribe to that, and that you shouldn't lose anything, while he gained—"

And there she stopped, remembering that that was the place where the blush came in.

During the delivery of this speech Egbert's fervid emotions had time to cool, and gradually he comprehended the interpretations that had been put upon his strange behavior.

Had he been content to let matters take their course, here was an avenue of escape from the necessity of ugly explanations, left open to him by Felix's lack of penetration. But the difficulty did not lie here—the dread possibilities of the future loomed as black as ever.

She, so frail, so childlike!—how could she withstand the storm that hung over her life, ready to burst at any moment? He could but clasp her close in the arms that were powerless to protect her, and breathe heavily with pain.

She saw that she had not won him back to composure, and so tried another tack.

"Come and sit down, dear," she said, and gently drew him to an iron garden bench.

Passively he submitted himself to her guidance. When he had sat down, she perched herself in his lap (as she had done ever since she was a little girl, and he in a measure took the place of a father to her), drew his arms about her, nestled her head on his shoulder, and so, stroking his cheek with her soft palm, looked up into his face with her most winning smile.

"Don't you see?" she said, "I am your own little Adele, just the same! I sha'n't be one bit more of a grown-up woman than I always have been. I told Felix that I should sit in your lap, and he said that was all right." (Just what Felix had said was: "All right, my lady, provided, to wit: that you let me occupy your leisure—say during the few minutes each day when Stanhope is taking the air!—in the same way," but it wasn't necessary to quote the proviso in seeking to comfort Egbert—was it?) "So, you see, you can pet me just as much as you like."

And again she smiled in his face and kissed him.

The whole proceeding was so innocent and childlike that the world-weary man was touched beyond expression.

Gathering her close in his arms, he murmured:

"Oh, my little darling, how I wish I could take you away from everybody and everything, where we should never know a moment of pain!"

And again he was shaken by a storm of sobs, something like the outburst that night in the state-room of the River Queen.

Now a great hush fell upon the child-woman. She twined her arms about his neck so closely that it would have been painful to him, had his emotions left him free to notice it. Her breast began to rise and fall with labored breathing, and every muscle in her slight frame began to tremble.

For perhaps a minute they sat thus, neither moving or speaking. Then the girl put her hands on the man's shoulders, and drew back so that she could look him in the face.

"Egbert," she said, in a voice so hard and husky that it would not have been recognizable as hers, "if it pains you so, I will give—him—up."

She choked, seemed to swallow something, and added, in a rasping whisper:

"Only say the word."

With the moonlight falling full upon it, every vestige of color had left her face. Her great eyes were distended with a terrible, shrinking dread, as if she were waiting for her death-blow. Pending his reply, she held her breath.

The man was greatly shocked. For the first time he realized what he had made her suffer. Hastily he cried:

"Adele! Adele! Why, my little pet! did you imagine for a moment that I would let a selfish love come between you and happiness? No, dear, you have made a mistake. My greatest happiness would be to see you loving and loved by a man worthy of your tender heart."

Then came the reaction. The girl seemed to collapse, so suddenly did she sink upon his breast, to lie there, limp and helpless, breathing in great gasps, and moaning with every exhalation:

"Oh!—Oh!—Oh!—Oh!"

And Egbert Stanhope knew how much his devoted sister had offered to sacrifice for him.

By and by tears came to her relief, and then her naturally sunny temperament gradually asserted itself.

When she was calmer, he said:

"Go into the house now, dear, and try to regain your composure. Forgive me again for subjecting you to such distress."

He put her down, and rose to his feet.

"Won't you come, too, Egbert?" she asked, timidly, still clinging to his hand.

"No—no," he said, with almost a shudder.

"Not yet! There! Good-night."

He kissed her and turned away.

A moment she looked after him, wistfully, as he walked with bowed head, and then yielded him that unquestioning obedience which was a part of her nature.

Left alone, the demon of unrest again seized upon Egbert Stanhope.

"So much a child, yet with a woman's tenacity of love! what will become of my darling, if he casts her off? Yet what can I do? To separate them now would be death to her heart, if not to her body. Bah! those fitted most to suffer have never the boon of physical annihilation! Hers would be a living death, like mine. On the other hand, some freak of that inscrutable Providence may let her escape. For fifteen years I have met no one who knew—And yet—and yet—"

He shuddered as the face of Long Jack arose before his mental vision.

Again he was plunged into troubled thought, until once more he burst forth furiously:

"Oh! let the mocking fiends and Omnipotent Beneficence fight it out between them! What is Felix Cornish to me! I am the guardian of no man's honor! Honor! Curse him! if he ever dares to look upon her as a source of disparagement to him, I'll—I'll kill the hound!"

He hurled forth the threat with clenched hands, and blazing eyes; but as suddenly his rage melted into helpless grief.

"Oh! my pure darling! my pure darling!" he moaned. "It is her pain that I am powerless to avert!"

While he walked with his hands pressed over his white face, and the tears trickling between his fingers, he was disturbed by the sound of a footstep, and looked up, to behold—

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE WOOLING.

ADELE STANHOPE left her brother's presence

in a very puzzled frame of mind. From his own lips she had the assurance (and his manner had confirmed it) that he had some cause of distress other than pain at the prospect of sharing her love with another.

And perhaps here is as good a place as any to tell what Adele knew of her brother and of his secret sorrow.

Her memory of him dated back to her seventh year, ten years previous, when he had been summoned home from abroad to comfort his mother in her recent widowhood.

Child as she was, Adele had been struck by the air of melancholy and cynicism which so ill-befitted a young man of twenty-five; and just at first she stood a little in awe of the brother whom she could not remember having seen, since he had left home during her babyhood. But after that meeting, when the widowed mother had hung so long on his breast, with such profuse weeping and such yearning tokens of endearment, she had lifted little Adele and placed her in his lap, saying:

"Egbert, my son, I give her into your keeping. She is my most precious possession. I need not ask you to love her when I have followed her father, as I feel that I shall do before long. Adele, you must love your brother with unremitted tenderness. If he is ever sad, you must win him back to smiles as you think I would do."

Then Egbert had taken her chin in his hand, and raised her sweet child-face, and gazed into it with such admiration and longing, wistful love that her whole heart had gone out to him at once.

He had always been marked by the same scrupulous elegance of attire. As intimate as were their relations, she had never seen him without gloves. At table they were white kid; at other times of a color suitable to the occasion.

Even at his mother's death-bed Adele remembered that they had not been removed; for the dying woman had taken his hand and laid it between her cheek and the pillow, and so kept it until her spirit took its flight.

Only once had Adele ever referred to this strange custom; and then her mother had become so agitated that the child was frightened lest her excessive grief should snap the frail tie that bound her to life. She had cautioned Adele never while she loved the memory of her mother to refer to this before Egbert; and henceforward it had remained to the girl a sealed mystery. Only this she knew: in some way it commended him to her tender, commiserating love.

Of surmises she had entertained but one—that it was in some way connected with some woman in his past life, since, until Sibyl Cornish he had treated with a cold, distant courtesy all women except his sister, and on her he had lavished all the tenderness of his rich nature. But beyond this bare fact the surmise had nothing to rest upon.

As we become accustomed to anything by habit, so ordinarily Adele now thought nothing of this difference between her brother and other men. But when he was sad, then she knew that the sorrow of his life bore heavily upon him, and she would infuse into her manifestations of affection all the yearning love that she had seen in her mother's manner toward him at such times.

Now she did not see what could be the connection between his secret sorrow and her marriage with Felix; but she felt that it was this, and not a selfish clinging to her exclusive love, that was the occasion of his distress. However, her quick perceptions showed her that it was better to leave Felix and his sister in the impression that his strange behavior sprang from even a vulgar jealousy, than to lead them to suspect that it had any unusual and mysterious source.

She found Felix frowning with impatience, and Sibyl anxious almost to distraction, though she curbed her feelings bravely to any but a woman's penetrating scrutiny.

"Well, how did you find this—this dog in the manger, and where is he now?" asked Felix, half-jestingly, half in earnest.

His little lady-love went up to him, and put her finger reprovingly on his lips.

"He is in the river garden. Don't be impatient with him, you hard-hearted boy—he's not going to interfere with our happiness. But if he bade me not, do you think your selfishness would be gratified? When you owe every thing to his magnanimity, how can you call him such wicked names?"

The power of her love for Felix was manifest in the lightness of tone she adopted. With the great joy of the consciousness of his love se-

cured streaming through her soul, she could not be sad in his presence, though at the same time her heart bled for her brother.

"I'm mighty grateful to him, I'm sure," replied Felix. "But I stick to it—he's worse than a Turk. Even they do not, so far as I have heard, shut up their sisters so that no one can get a peep at them. But why didn't he come in with you? Is he going to mull over it all night, out there in the moonlight?"

She stopped his lips with hers, and, instead of answering him, went over to Sibyl, took both her hands, and gazed into her white, pleading face with an intelligence that read its secret.

"Will you go out to him, dear?" she asked. "Perhaps you can have influence with him, where I have failed."

She was hoping a great good to her sorrow-stricken brother, if these two could be brought together now.

"Oh! no! no!" cried Sibyl, shrinking back in dismay, while the rich blood streamed all over her face and neck.

"And why not, pray?" asked obtuse Felix. "That's just the thing. If I wasn't laid on the shelf, I'd exercise my prerogative of host, and go out and drag him in by the scruff of the neck, and have done with his nonsense. As the duties of both host and hostess now devolve upon you, what more appropriate than that you should beg him, of his good pleasure, to deign to honor us once more with his gracious company? Tut! tut! no woman's quibbles! The whole sex have a budget of objections, when they don't want to do just what they ought to do."

"Go, dear," whispered Adele. "I think he wants you now, more perhaps than he ever will again, if you do not go to him. You don't know how pained he looks. He's all alone! won't you go to him, my sister?"

Thus urged, Sibyl Cornish followed the promptings of her own heart as well, and two minutes later her step aroused Egbert from his painful meditations.

Thus far she had hurried all breathlessly, not giving herself time to think: but now that she stood in his actual presence her embarrassment was overwhelming. What would he think of her? was the question that made her stand with eyes on the ground and cheeks flaming crimson.

But now that she was come she must not stand there confessing her secret by her silence and confusion. Raising her eyes timidly to his face, she said:

"Mr. Stanhope, will you not come in? We are all very anxious—"

And then her leaden tongue refused to articulate another syllable, palsied by his fixed regard.

He had indeed stared at her in disconcerting fashion, as if, putting aside all external disguises, he were reading her secret soul.

He saw her stop in helpless confusion, and cover her face with her hands. One step, and he clutched her wrists and tore her hands from before her face.

She looked up at him piteously, her gaze constrained by the intense magnetism of his.

He was terribly beautiful at this culminating point in his life, like some demi-god, who would lift her to the skies, or hurl her to the abyss, as she should in that moment prove worthy or unworthy. And she, with quivering lips and panting breath, hung only on his will.

Fiercely he cried:

"Why have you come out to me? Why are you now pale and now red? Why do you tremble so? Where is your pride—your self-possession?"

"Don't! don't! she pleaded, not comprehending fully what prompted her own words, but only dimly conscious of some blow to be averted.

He laughed.

"Shall I tell you?" he cried. "It is because you love me. You know you do! See! see! you cannot deny it!"

No woman of spirit would endure such inverted wooing as that. Although her heart was at his feet, her pride was stung to the front, and spurning the weak fluttering thing, mounted, for the time, right royally over its downfall.

With the exertion of all her strength she sought to wrench her wrists from his grasp, while she cried with blazing eyes:

"Let me go, sir!—this instant!"

"Never! Never! All the powers of hell shall not deprive me of the prize I have won!"

And with one mighty sweep of his arms, he caught her to his heart, and fell to covering her face with kisses.

He held a limp and unresisting burden. She had fainted with excess of emotion.

"Shall every living thing have its mate, and

"I alone be denied?" he cried, aloud; and now, as ever, he seemed to apostrophize his gloved right hand. "No! no! I defy you all—all! What have I done that I should be singled out for the cup of Tantalus? I have that which will win the love of my kind. And shall I not accept it? I will! I will! Come what may, I will grasp the good that has fallen to my lot!"

With the unconscious girl in his arms he strode to the house and into the presence of his sister and her lover, to their not slight astonishment. Sibyl's cheek rested on his shoulder, and her arms were about his neck, where he had placed them; so the other two could not see that she had fainted, and thought this a rather strange way for a lady of such stately propriety as Sibyl to come before them.

Excitement had brought an artificial color to Egbert's cheeks, and his eyes flashed brightly. With forced pleasantry he cried:

"Well, friend Cornish, they say that fair exchange is not robbery. If you deprive me of my sister, you will doubtless be willing to give me yours in return."

"Eh? What? Sibyl?" cried the bewildered Felix. "Well, here's a situation for you! With all my heart, my dear fellow, if the lady herself is agreeable."

"I have reason to believe that she is agreeable," said Egbert, with rather grim humor.

"Oh! I knew it! I knew it! I knew it!" cried Adele, fairly jumping up and down, and clapping her little hands. "Oh, you love!—just let me get at you!"

And she rushed forward to devour with love the woman who had crowned Egbert's life with happiness.

"Why didn't you say all this last night, like a civilized being and a Christian? Here you have been making us all uncomfortable for a day to no earthly purpose," grumbled Felix; but here he was interrupted by a cry from Adele.

"Why, she has fainted!"

"Yes," admitted Egbert. "Which accounts for my fetching her into the room in this fashion."

"And you have been standing here talking all this time—"

But the girl stopped in breathless maze at the enormity.

"Stay where you are, Adele. I think that I can take care of her," said Egbert, and without further words marched out of the room as he had come.

When the door closed, Adele turned to Felix, appealingly.

He laughed.

"Is it possible that you are surprised at any unusual proceeding on the part of that very original gentleman? Have you yet to learn that he is the ghost in Hamlet?"

"But Sibyl?"

"Oh, don't worry about her. I never heard of a young lady dying in a faint—did you? Trust her to come round as soon as is convenient for the parties most nearly interested."

Meanwhile, Egbert had borne Sibyl into a sitting-room and laid her on a sofa, while he exerted himself to reanimate her limp form. In the first moments of returning consciousness he wanted her all to himself.

And her first waking perception was of her lover, kneeling beside her with his arms about her, and whispering into her ear words that it gladdened her heart to hear.

Under her gentle ministrations all the soreness of Egbert's long-tried heart was allayed. For the time, at least, he was supremely happy.

By Felix's suggestion nothing had been said to his mother about his suit with Adele during Egbert's strange absence, and as it was late when Egbert and Sibyl reached an understanding, he further counseled that the whole matter be deferred until morning.

"If you tell her now, she will be in a pucker all night. Break the glad tidings at the breaking of morn, and she'll have the whole day in which to regain her wonted equanimity."

Mrs. Cornish received the intelligence with so ill a grace that she began by reproaching Sibyl, and then, ignoring her hypochondria, bilious attack, or what not, had herself dressed and went down to Felix's room with colors flying. But an hour's interview with her son put her through the roles of an outraged society queen, the mother of ungrateful children, etc., to be followed by hysteria, melancholy martyrdom, and lastly that state of dignified acquiescence which enabled her to receive Egbert's proposals for her daughter's hand and Adele's shy advances of affection with at least unruffled composure.

So the course of true love bade fair to prove the rule by an exception, when the marplot en-

tered upon the stage in the person of Long Jack.

CHAPTER XII.

LONG JACK'S THREAT.

IN order to preserve uninterrupted the logical continuity of events, the minor threads of our narrative have been suppressed, to be now taken up when they begin to affect the pattern of the fabric.

M. Bourdoine had again encountered disappointment. The phantom of his early love still eluded him, like an *ignis fatuus*.

He sought his friends with the pitiful tale, fairly wallowing in the Slough of Despond; and for one whole day Sibyl and Adele were at their wits' ends trying to console him.

Just before the arrival of the dinner-hour he wiped the tears from his eyes, shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"*Eh, bien!* eet is ze Fate implacable. Vat am I zat I shall note bow to ze decree of Providence? Ze fool shall cloud ze present vis repinings of destiny immutable; ze wise man shall bask in ze passing sunshine! *Purbleu!* am I vone ingrate, zat I shall remain melancholique vis two soche divine consoler?"

And he kissed their hands in homage to their beauty.

At dinner he grew merry over his wine with Felix, and later he made one of the fair girls play on the piano while he danced with the other. As he was a "divine" waltzer, they were nothing loth; so that M. Bourdoine's day of despair ended with one of the pleasantest evenings they had enjoyed.

Having again set matters in train for a renewed search for "*la belle Helene*," M. Bourdoine's business in the city was concluded, and the day subsequent to the double betrothal saw him regularly installed at Riverside, on a visit of indefinite length to his old pupil.

His delight at the matrimonial prospects of the young people knew no bounds. He felicitated Felix; he felicitated Egbert; he felicitated Adele; he felicitated his pupil adorable. He even went with his congratulations to Mrs. Cornish, who, having been shocked out of her hypochondria, now favored the family with her company; and the wry face with which she received his eulogies of Egbert and his rhapsodies over Adele kept Felix in a constant state of internal laughter.

But over one thing Felix dropped the corners of his mouth in dismay, while M. Bourdoine elevated his eyebrows and shoulders in astonishment. Egbert would not hear to Adele's marriage until she had turned eighteen, which was still a year distant, though he was possessed of a feverish anxiety to hasten the consummation of his own marriage with Sibyl, and had prevailed upon her to fix the day upon the first of February, an interval of only two months.

And now for the *bête noire*, Long Jack.

When introduced to the notice of the reader on board the River Queen his dress and manners were in keeping with his character of a "sport."

On visiting Riverside he showed that in attire and demeanor he understood the amenities of a gentleman as well.

He catered to Mrs. Cornish's pet prejudices and vanities so skillfully that he won her from thinking "Long Jack" a "low fellow, no doubt," to esteeming Mr. John Boardman above Egbert.

He waxed enthusiastic over "the Little Corporal" to M. Bourdoine. He praised Sibyl's skill at riding, criticised her water-colors, and showed her how to mount some of the more delicate *algæ*—her botanical hobby. Felix pronounced him a clever fellow because of his knowledge of wines, the turf, and sport with rod and gun, and his never pointless stories. Egbert's instinctive repugnance was conciliated by unvaried cheerfulness, dashed with a shade of formality.

But it was to Adele that he paid an especially delicate deference. Whether he accompanied himself on her lute, or formed one of their quartette at the piano, where Adele's clear soprano blended sweetly with Sibyl's mellow alto and Egbert's bass, his fine tenor voice was always intoned to charm her senses. He had that happy faculty of making her feel that nothing that she said or did escaped him, which, while it was flattering, was so little obtrusive as to be not at all embarrassing.

As for Adele, what with her gratitude to him in particular, and her girlish faith in mankind in general, she thought him a very agreeable gentleman.

A day or two subsequent to her betrothal she accepted a seat beside him for a drive.

After chatting for half an hour, Jack's fluency

of speech gradually left him, until Adele found that she was doing most of the talking. She looked at him and saw that he was cutting with the whip at a fly on the horse's flank and looking very abstracted.

"What is the matter, Mr. Boardman?" she asked. "You don't seem to be enjoying the drive at all. Here I have been calling your attention to that cloud, and I don't believe you have heard a word I have said."

"Excuse me! Yes, it is very fantastic," he said. Then, resuming his occupation with the whip, he went on:

"Miss Stanhope, I have brought you out to-day, having something particular to say to you. You must have noticed my preference for your society. I owe you the happiest moments of my life, and I have sometimes dared to hope that you were glad to have me come to Riverside."

But here he was interrupted.

"Mr. Boardman!—please!" she cried, in evident distress, laying her hand on his arm.

He dropped the whip with which he was toying, and instantly put his hand down upon hers.

"Adele!" he cried, with sudden fervor, "you are the sun of my existence. I love you so that with you hell has no terrors, and without you heaven has no charm! My darling, I know what is trembling on your lips—I can see it in your eyes. I have been too precipitate. Don't answer me now. Forget what I have said. Give me time to show you what I can do to make you happy."

The pain in the man's face was unmistakable, and his eyes were full of dread.

The girl was so moved that she took his trembling hand between both of hers, and said, with starting tears: "Oh my dear friend! you must not think me a coquette. I did not foresee this—indeed I did not. I have found pleasure in your companionship, but not such as you wish. And you must accept my answer now as final. It will save us both pain."

"Stop! stop!" he pleaded. "I want to tell you something. When you first saw me I was a professional gambler, and I have done worse things than that. I do not pretend that there is any excuse for wickedness, but there may be extenuating circumstances; and what a man is depends as often upon his surroundings as upon his natural inclinations."

"I began life as innocently as any one. I was enthusiastic on the side of principle, and believed in the goodness of people. But I was deceived again and again, until I learned to distrust everybody. It was an easy step to hate, and then to disregard the rights of others."

"But, Adele, when we were alone in the water together I loved you, and my whole life underwent a revolution—"

"Ah! after all that I owe you, to think that I should cause you such pain!" sighed the girl.

"Don't!" he said. "I did not mean to remind you of that. I only wish to show that you gave me a new incentive to lead a life the antipodes of that I had been leading. And as an earnest of my sincerity, I have engaged in a legitimate business in Memphis."

"Adele, don't thrust me back into my old life, with this disappointment added to all its bitterness. You can save me. Is not the power in some degree indicative of the duty? Will you put it aside lightly?"

"But you need not let this turn you back from right—"

"I care nothing for right in the abstract. I know that I could not make you happy without a certain degree of goodness. I only desire it as a means to that end."

"I am pained to hear you speak so," said the girl, gravely.

"But you can make all right. Give me your love!"

The girl shook her head.

"It is impossible!"

"At least give me time to try to change your decision."

"It is useless. While I regard you with sincere friendship, I have not and never can have a spark of love for you."

The man gazed into her face a moment, and then his head sunk upon his breast, while a gloomy frown contracted his brows.

For perhaps ten minutes he neither moved nor spoke.

Then Adele ventured timidly:

"Had not we better turn back, Mr. Boardman?"

"One moment, if you please," he replied. "Would you consider it impertinent if I were to ask whether you have bestowed your affections elsewhere?"

She was not angry or annoyed. She pitied him from the depths of her tender heart.

"Would it do any good to answer that question?" she asked, gently.

"It would influence my future course of action," he replied, moodily.

She thought a moment, and then answered:

"Yes, I have."

"Ah!" he exclaimed, quickly. "Then you are already engaged? Otherwise you would not answer me so frankly."

"I am."

"And to Felix Cornish?"

"Yes."

A quiet dignity had crept into her manner. He was urging her too hard.

Again he was silent. His pale lips gradually became rigid with determination.

"Miss Stanhope," he began again, "you love your brother?"

"Well?" wonderingly.

"You would do much to secure his happiness?"

"Certainly."

"Or to prevent an overwhelming calamity from falling upon him?"

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, a vague terror coming into her eyes.

"Have patience a moment. He has not led a very happy life?"

"Every one has sorrows, I suppose."

"But an especial cloud has overhung his life?"

His piercing eye was reading her face. She changed color, but remained silent.

"Miss Stanhope, I have noticed a growing intimacy between your brother and Miss Cornish. Has he already declared his love for her and been accepted?"

"You have no right to ask—"

"You need not answer me. I see by your face that he has. Once more—your brother has an unusual habit of dress. Have you ever been informed as to the reason?"

The girl's cheeks flamed crimson.

"Mr. Boardman," she said, with dignity, "I need hardly suggest that your conversation has taken a very unacceptable turn."

"If you do not know what lies beneath that glove," he pursued, not heeding her, "I can tell you."

A look of burning curiosity for one instant flashed in her eyes. Then they dropped before his exultant gaze.

"Mr. Boardman, take me home at once."

"Adele, I have no desire to persecute him. Nor would I turn my hand over to protect the Cornishes. But if I were to tell what I know, Sibyl Cornish would shrink from her lover in loathing, and Felix would eject him from his doors. For your sake, Adele, I will keep his secret, even from you, whom he has kept so carefully in the dark."

"Mr. Boardman, I demand to be taken home immediately. I will not listen to another word."

"Either you must, or others shall."

"For myself and in my brother's behalf, I defy you to produce anything to his prejudice."

"Must I tell you then?"

"I will not listen to you! Let me get out of the carriage. I will walk home."

She rose, as if to leap out.

He clutched her wrist and forced her back into her seat.

"Adele Stanhope, all women are recklessly swayed by impulse; but if you allow passion to dominate your reason now, on our return I will denounce your brother as—"

And he fairly hissed the remaining words in her ear.

The blood streamed all over the girl's face and neck.

"You are a falsifier and a slanderer!" she cried.

"Look back over your acquaintance with him. Have you ever seen his hand ungloved?"

It was true, she never had.

"Of what other man could that be said? Who wears white kids at an ordinary family breakfast? Why should he?"

The questions were unanswerable.

"Look at his face. Is he not a prey to secret sorrow? You know him intimately. Have you never been astonished by outbursts for which you could not reasonably account?"

The scene in the state-room of the River Queen! His strange behavior over her betrothal! Her mother's pitying grief, and a thousand and one incidents, all linked in mystery.

The girl was completely unbalanced!

"Adele, I do not say that the indiscretions of a man's youth should follow him all his life long. He may have repented and reformed. Need I picture to you what effect this exposure will have on his life?"

"Stop! stop!" pleaded the stricken girl. "Give me time! Take me home now, please."

Without a word he turned the horse's head.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DIE IS CAST!

WHEN Adele and Jack reached Riverside, Egbert and Sibyl were boating on the river. Mrs. Cornish was having her beauty-sleep, and Felix was taking a bath—a luxury in the enjoyment of which he emulated the old Romans, and which was sure to occupy him until dinner-time. Adele employed this respite to regain her composure, and when she met the rest of the household at dinner, only Sibyl noticed any change in her.

Two days later, Jack, who was to be one of the quartette to practice a mass, sent his regrets and the information that he was suddenly called away from town. Then Sibyl drew the most natural inference, and kept her own counsel.

But from the unsophisticated M. Bourdoine Long Jack had learned all about the engagements, and was, as he would have said, "playing his cards fine."

To Felix Adele was just the gentlest betrothed that ever was. And he accepted it all like a Grand Sultan, never dreaming how much of her tenderness was remorseful; because there was a battle going on in her mind whether she should sacrifice him to save Egbert.

But hardest of all was her intercourse with her brother.

A great change had come over Egbert. His accustomed almost melancholy gravity had given place to a strange fickleness of temper.

He could scarcely endure to have Sibyl out of his sight. If she were gone but half an hour, he grew restless and almost fretful. When parting with her at night, he clung to her hands as if for the last time; and in the morning he greeted her with a sense of relief that would not be concealed. One night on awaking she found him pacing the lawn beneath her window. When, after watching him awhile, she again sought her pillow, her heart swelling with happiness and love, and on her lips a prayer for guidance in making his life one long summer day, the clock on her mantelpiece chimed three!

In company with others there was nothing "spoony" about him. He seemed artificially exuberant, and his ebullitions of wit and his brilliant conversation charmed his hearers.

But they were much alone together, and then he was silent for the most part, or spoke short sentences in a low, almost caressing tone. He would sit holding her hand, and when his eyes rested upon her, it was with a sort of remorseful tenderness.

All this Adele noticed, and she shuddered at the thought of Long Jack's threat being carried into effect. But another influence was at work. As she reflected on the ten years she had known Egbert so intimately, and now listened to the noble sentiments he uttered, she began to wonder how she could have entertained for an instant Long Jack's absurd charge.

The gambler's departure she construed as an ignominious flight after the failure of his scheme; and as the first of February approached, bringing the conclusion of the preparations for the marriage, in the absorbing interests of the occasion she almost forgot Long Jack and the anxiety he had caused her.

But the day before the great event Jack made his appearance, and having got her alone in the drawing-room, said:

"Adele, I have given you the time you asked. I am come now for your answer. Understand, if you refuse my terms, the happiness of your brother and his affianced is wrecked, and you and Felix will be in no better situation. You know the pride underlying his carelessness where any real issue of honor or dishonor is presented. I leave it to you whether he will marry the sister of Egbert Stanhope when he knows the truth. On the other hand, if you accept, no word will pass my lips, and at least two will be happy, the one in her ignorance, the other in the possession of what he most craves on earth. What is your decision?"

The girl had listened patiently. Now she drew herself to her full height, and stood before him.

"Mr. Boardman," she replied, very distinctly, "at our last interview you took me unawares, and I was weak enough to listen to your gross assault on my brother's honor. Since then I have had time to reflect and to see him in all his grand manhood. It is to my lasting shame that I ever permitted a shadow of a doubt of him to enter my mind. Sir, you may have the power to wound him, by referring to that which

may be a great misfortune, but that you can successfully impeach his honor I do not believe—I know that you cannot! While I would do all within reason to spare him pain, I would be untrue to myself and to him to make so disproportionate a sacrifice as to wreck my life and forswear my womanhood to shield him from that distress for which the love of his wife and of myself can afterward compensate. No, sir! I spurn your proposition, as an insult to my brother and to myself."

She turned to leave the room, but he caught her wrist.

"Adele, you are beside yourself!" he cried. "You may selfishly refuse to shield him, hoping to retain Felix for yourself, in spite of the dishonor; but you cannot discredit the fact that I assert."

"You greatly mistake me, if you think I am actuated by selfish motives. As strange as it may appear to you, I would stake my life on my brother being incapable of what you charge him with. Allow me to pass, if you please."

"But all appearances are in corroboration."

"Then they are mistaken appearances."

"Oh! when will a woman be reasonable? I swear to you it is true! If you do not listen to me I will summon the family this instant and denounce him before them all! You need not be to the trouble of leaving the room, for I shall require your attendance with the rest."

He approached the bell-rope and took it in his hand.

"Yes, or no?" he demanded, sternly.

The girl turned pale and faint, but in a firm voice she said:

"Emphatically and irrevocably—no!"

Long Jack gave the bell-rope a violent wrench.

Adele stood breathless.

The door opened, and a servant appeared.

"For the last time!" whispered Jack. "Shall I say that you want a glass of water?"

"No, sir!" said Adele, disdainfully.

"In heaven's name, reflect!"

Jack was pale as death. The attainment of his life-object hung in the balance.

"I have reflected. Do your worst."

With dilating nostrils Jack turned to the waiting servant.

"Say to Mr. Cornish that I wish to see him and his whole household, including Mr. Stanhope and Monsieur Bourdoine!"

For good or ill, the die was cast!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DENUNCIATION.

WITH a dizzy sense of suffocation Adele sunk into a seat.

There was an interval of dead silence. Then the door opened and Felix entered, looking very much puzzled.

"Do I understand my servant," he asked, "that you wish to see—"

"Your whole household, if you please."

"Why, what in the world—"

"I have an announcement to make in which all are vitally concerned."

"Including Mr. Stanhope and Monsieur Bourdoine?"

"Yes—the last more as a friend of the family, perhaps."

"Summon Mrs. Cornish and the two gentlemen," said Felix to the servant.

Sibyl entered while he was speaking. At a glance she noticed Adele's agitation.

"What is the matter, dear?" she whispered, going to her side.

"Wait! wait!" said the girl, breathlessly, avoiding the arm Sibyl would have put about her.

Sibyl looked surprised, and turned her eyes upon Long Jack.

He stood leaning against the mantle, tracing the pattern of the carpet with the end of his rafter. He was very pale, with compressed lips and a gloomy frown.

Felix, seeing that there was something unpleasant on the carpet, and that Adele was in some way concerned in it, walked straight over to her, sat down beside her, and took her hand.

"Well, little love," he said, in a low tone, yet with the air of one who was ready and able to fight the whole world in her defense, "there is no occasion to look so scared, whatever lies back of this mysterious invocation."

Again the girl, more nervously than before, said:

"Wait! wait!"

And she not only withdrew her hand, but started to her feet.

Felix flushed scarlet, and then with slow com-

ing pallor he turned his eyes upon the gambler. M. Bourdoine appeared in the doorway, saw at a glance the general discomfiture, paused with his most deprecating bow, and said: "Mille pardons! Eet is no mistake! Did monsieur summon me?"

"Pray enter, M. Bourdoine," said Felix.

The Frenchman bowed again, glanced once more around the circle, shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly, and walked to a window.

Mrs. Cornish now entered, and bridled the instant she felt the atmosphere of the place. Her step became a stately march, and in icy tones she asked:

"What is it, Felix?"

"Be seated, please. Doubtless we will all hear presently," replied her son.

Lastly came Egbert.

There was a dreamy half-smile on his face at the moment he opened the door. He stopped instantly, and stood framed in the doorway, stricken with sudden pallor.

Until now he had not been apprised of Long Jack's return. He had forgotten all about him, or thought him hundreds of miles away. Now the gambler stood glaring at him with almost ferocious malignity.

It was the day before the culmination of his happiness. Was Fate about to dash the cup from his lips at the last moment?

Every eye was fixed upon his face. He stood like a man brought to bay.

With a suppressed cry, Adele glided across the room and slipped her hand through his arm. As plainly as words could have expressed it the action declared her determination to stand or fall with him.

Egbert glanced down at her in mute acknowledgment, and then advanced steadily into the room.

Sibyl would have risen and gone to him; but Felix caught her wrist and drew her back into her seat. He had a man's instinctive shrinking from a "scene."

"Be seated, Stanhope," he said, essaying his wonted off-hand manner. "Mr. Boardman seems to have something to impart which demands the united wisdom of the family."

"Mr. Boardman, pray proceed. We all attend you."

"My friends," began Long Jack, with a sweeping bow, which included all the Cornishes, and a separate one to M. Bourdoine, which made his ignoring of the Stanhopes all the more marked, "a very painful duty has devolved upon me, but I feel that the claims of hospitality and the ordinary due of humanity prohibit me from silence."

"Mr. Cornish, I understand that your sister is on the eve of marriage."

"Yes—well?"

"What do you know of the man she is about to marry?"

Sibyl started forward, and then sunk back into her seat.

Mrs. Cornish's eyes flashed, and beneath her breath she murmured:

"What, indeed?"

Adele, who had remained standing beside her brother, put her arm about his neck, as if to protect him.

Egbert never moved a muscle.

"Eh? What do I know about him?" repeated Felix, in bewilderment.

"Exactly?"

"Why, what should I know about him? What do you know about him?"

"Mr. Cornish, have you noticed nothing peculiar about him—nothing which might seem to demand explanation before you receive him into your family, as your sister's husband?"

"Come! come, sir! This is paltering. Every man has his peculiarities. If you know anything to his discredit—any reason why he should not become my sister's husband—out with it at once. You are dealing with a man who is impatient of innuendoes, and demands plain words."

"Very well, sir. I will be sufficiently pointed to suit your humor: Why is Egbert Stanhope never seen unglorified?"

"It is strange," murmured Mrs. Cornish.

M. Bourdoine started forward, with a hand on either knee, aspirating softly, with the rising infection:

"Ah!"

Anguish-stricken, Adele bent until her lips were at her brother's ear, and whispered:

"My darling! my darling!"

Egbert sat like a man of marble. His face was gray with pallor, and the tense muscles showed how his soul was racked with pain.

Sibyl rose and hastened toward her lover.

While she was approaching him, Felix replied to Long Jack.

"What business is that of mine? Shall I prescribe habits of dress to all of my friends?"

"Before we get through, I apprehend that you will concede that it is a very serious business of yours, and that this is a very peculiar habit of dress."

"No doubt Mr. Stanhope can answer for himself," suggested Mrs. Cornish.

"No!" objected Sibyl, who had now gained her lover's side and put her hand on his shoulder. "I consider it a very impertinent question, and being the person most vitally concerned, I ask Mr. Stanhope not to answer it. Felix, I trust that you do not forget that he is our guest, and as such is entitled to protection from insult under our roof."

She was right royal in her indignant protest.

A transient flush came and went in Egbert's cheek. But he seemed to shrink from the touch of her hand, and, as Adele had done, said:

"Wait!"

"By Heaven!" cried Felix, starting to his feet, "no one shall have just cause to accuse me of disregard of the laws of hospitality! Mr. Boardman, I am no trifle. If you have any charge to bring against my guest, speak at once and in unequivocal terms. And, sir, understand this—if you do not sustain your charge, I will have you thrown out of my house!"

Long Jack smiled quietly. He was not a man to be disturbed by threats.

Raising his long arm, and pointing with his finger, as if it were a dagger, he said:

"Look at his face. Is it not written there? Mr. Cornish, your sister is about to marry a felon!"

"YOU LIE!"

Sweeping aside the clinging women, Egbert started from his chair and stood erect before his accuser, as pale as death and quivering in every muscle.

CHAPTER XV.

LONG JACK'S DEFEAT.

LONG JACK's charge and Egbert's unexpected retort created a profound sensation among their startled auditors.

M. Bourdoine leaped to his feet in the wildest excitement, ejaculating:

"*Morbleu! Sang-dieu! Sacre-r-re!*"

Adele wrung her hands and moaned piteously. Only she knew how terribly Egbert was suffering.

Felix was speechless with amazement.

Mrs. Cornish started forward, crying:

"Oh! my child! my poor child!"

She would have clasped Sibyl in her arms, but the girl shook her off, and, with all her queenly pride in erect carriage and flashing eyes, stepped to Egbert's side.

"Sir," she said, "my husband that is to be has rightly stigmatized your foul slander. You have undertaken a thankless task, the motive for which is, I think, clear to me. Egbert Stanhope is not one to be injured by anything a man of your stamp can say. If you can take a hint you will desist from urging this further."

Amid all this excitement Long Jack stood unmoved. Bowing deeply, he replied:

"Madam, I must protect you from dishonor even against your will. You must concede that I have made the charge, not after the manner of a slanderer, but boldly to his face. If my words are not true, he has the power to produce an overwhelming refutation. Let him remove his glove!"

The gambler hurled the challenge full in Egbert's teeth.

The latter seemed to try to speak, but his tongue refused its office.

"He dare not!" hissed the gambler, triumphantly.

"He may have reasons—perfectly honorable ones—for declining to comply with your demand," replied Sibyl, stoutly. "I ask no proof. The man himself is sufficient refutation of your absurd charge."

"My brother, have not we had enough of this?"

"I think that an impartial judge," pursued Long Jack, in his cold, even tones, "would consider the man himself, in his present appearance, at least, rather a confirmation of what I have alleged."

"Why cannot Mr. Stanhope settle the matter by removing his glove?" asked Mrs. Cornish, coldly.

"Mother, that is unworthy of you!" exclaimed

ed her daughter, flushing to the temples. "After I have proclaimed my confidence in a man by giving my whole life into his keeping, shall I so far forget my own self-respect as to ask him to clear himself from the charge of crime? Never!"

Hers was a royal dignity—a grand loyalty.

But Mrs. Cornish was one not easily impressed by lofty sentiments.

"I think that it is due to you and to all of us that he place himself above reproach without being asked," she replied, looking at Egbert suspiciously. "I am sure it is a very simple matter."

Felix had thus far stood irresolute. Long Jack's boldness and Egbert's embarrassment had naturally begun to shake his faith.

Frowning impatiently, he now said:

"I must say that I can see no objection to it. While delicacy might deter us from asking it, it would seem due to the gentleman himself to refute a charge so boldly made."

M. Bourdoine looked his expectation. He would not run the risk of offending his pupil, by openly siding against her betrothed. But he was clearly of Felix's opinion.

Sibyl turned and threw her arms about Egbert's neck.

"My darling," she whispered, "you see that my faith is not shaken. And I would spare you pain if I could."

For that act and those words Adele worshipped the trusting woman.

Egbert drew the clinging arms from about his neck. Long he gazed into the face, every line of which bespoke love and confidence, while a terrible struggle went forward in his breast.

Presently he spoke.

"Sibyl, after what has transpired, can you live with me day after day, never seeing my hand, never receiving one word of explanation, and yet trust me?"

"Implicitly!"

"But will not an ever-visible mystery prey upon your mind?"

"If my husband had a secret sorrow, I might wish to know it, so that I might console him," said the girl truthfully; "but my mind could never be a prey to idle curiosity. Why, has not Adele lived with you and loved you? She could not feel toward you as she does, if you were not all that is grand and noble!"

At that a great light and a great tenderness came into Egbert Stanhope's face. He turned toward his sister with a gratitude that was beyond and above words.

A murmuring cry escaped the girl's lips. She leaped forward and nestled within his encircling arm.

"I have much to thank God for in the love of two such women!" said Egbert.

Then gazing earnestly in his sister's face, he went on:

"But my Adele knows no more of the mystery of my life than do you."

A look of surprise flashed across Sibyl's face. Then she said, triumphantly:

"And yet she has trusted you! Why not I? Egbert, let your life be your vindication to me!"

"By Heaven! I will!" cried Egbert, with sudden resolve.

He caught her to his heart, kissed her brow, and put her away.

Advancing to Felix without so much as a glance at Long Jack, he said:

"My friend, I will satisfy you, and your friends will doubtless be content to rely on my word. But as I do not care to have bruited about that in which no one has any concern, I must first require from you a promise that you will never reveal what you shall see."

Impulsive Felix grasped his friend's hand with a look of relief.

"Stanhope," he said, "you are coming out like a man, as I knew you would. If I alone were concerned, I would show you that I could be as generous as Sibyl. I give you the promise with all my heart."

For the first time Long Jack looked ill at ease, as the two gentlemen walked off to a window at the further end of the room, and stood with their backs toward the company.

"By what infernal jugglery is he about to gull that blockhead?" he muttered, below his breath.

Mrs. Cornish looked after the gentlemen suspiciously.

The two girls were clasped in each other's arms, and were exchanging words of encouragement and endearment.

At the window Egbert drew his pen-knife from his pocket, opened it, inserted the keen

point in the finger of his kid glove, and slit it open, exposing the little and third fingers to view.

"There!" he said, fiercely, "would you have me show that to the woman who is to be my wife?"

The skin had that purple discoloration often noticed in birthmarks.

The hand quivered like an aspen. The man grasped the exposed fingers in his other hand, as if to hide them even from his own sight, and shivered from head to foot.

Felix gazed in astonishment. Could so simple a thing as a birthmark cloud this man's whole life? He gazed at the man himself, and noted the exquisite care evidently bestowed on his dress and person—what would have been dandyism but for its perfect good taste. Did this discoloration of the hand wound his æsthetic sense so as to induce this morbid sensitiveness? Felix remembered that a club-foot was the curse of Byron's life. But he could not help exclaiming:

"Is that all?"

"All!" repeated Egbert, as though his whole soul leaped up in arms. "My God! is it not sufficient?"

Without reply Felix turned again to the company.

Egbert followed him with his hand thrust into the breast of his coat.

"Mr. Boardman," said Felix, contemptuously, "you are evidently off the track. The sooner you relieve us of your unwelcome company, the more satisfactory it will be to all present."

Jack stood dumbfounded.

"Oh! it is nothing!" cried Sibyl, and threw herself upon her lover's breast. "My darling, I knew—I knew—"

But she broke down, sobbing hysterically.

"Now let me speak!" cried Adele, anticipating every one else. "I can supply the key to this infamous outrage! Two months ago and again to-day this gentleman urged me to be his wife, on penalty of exposing my brother, and thus separating not only Sibyl and him, but you and me, Felix. I scorned him as a slanderer, knowing my brother incapable of crime, and this is the carrying out of his threat."

Felix uttered an oath of rage, and rung the bell violently.

"Call the hostler, and tell him to bring his best whip!" he commanded the servant, whose prompt entrance would seem to indicate that she must have been in close vicinity to the key-hole.

"Stop!" cried Long Jack, now finding his voice. "Did he show you his palm?"

"Out upon you, you infamous cur!" cried Felix, not heeding him. "If I had my strength, I would throw you out of the house with my own hand. As it is, if you stay here long enough, you shall feel the weight of a horse-whip—the kind of treatment such a hound deserves!"

Long Jack turned pale with fury.

"My kind host," he said, "you have placed me under obligations to you, by your wise course in this matter; and I always pay my debts, in my own way and time. Now I would not, if I could, prevent this marriage. Go on with it, sir, by all means! When an heir is born to the untarnished name of Stanhope—ha! ha! ha!—you shall hear from me again; and it shall be no flash in the pan then, I promise you! The next descendant of the Cornishes will have an illustrious lineage, on one side at least! Ha! ha! ha! My dear sir, once more—*adieu!*"

Long Jack bowed mockingly in the doorway. But M. Bourdoine rushed up to him frantically.

"*Sang-dieu!*" he cried, "you shall note escape visout rendering ze satisfaction! Monsieur, my card!"

And he shook the bit of pasteboard at Long Jack savagely.

"What! fight with such a dog, M. Bourdoine?" cried Felix. "Pray, remember that gentlemen do not fight with the intimidators of women."

"*Morbleu!* shall I stand on etiquette when ze scoundrel have insult my pupil—my benefactors all! *Voilà!* My card!"

And he shook the card fairly under Long Jack's nose.

The gambler seized the wrist of the challenging hand, and stooped until his face was within an inch of M. Bourdoine's, while he glared into his eyes.

"*Bah!*" he ejaculated, contemptuously, and, hurling the Frenchman from him, passed out of the room, slamming the door.

The little man was wild at thus being thrust aside, as if he were too insignificant to be worthy

of notice. He would have rushed after Long Jack, but Felix restrained him.

Meanwhile, one strange feature in this scene was noticeable—Egbert had not resented Jack's assault upon him further than the one outburst in which he gave him the lie. Now he ignored the whole thing, and in an ordinary tone, as far as he could command it, invited Sibyl to accompany him in a walk in the open air.

Mrs. Cornish sat with compressed lips, and a look that showed that she at least was not satisfied with the course of events.

"Felix," she said, "will you give me a few minutes' audience in the library? Our guests will excuse us if, under the circumstances, we leave them to each other's entertainment."

CHAPTER XVI.

A SUSPICIOUS WOMAN.

"FELIX," said Mrs. Cornish, when she was closeted with her son, "I confess that I am not very well satisfied with Mr. Stanhope's rebuttal of the charge brought against him."

"We can't have every thing to our liking, in this world, mother," said the philosophical Felix.

"But why this mystery? Why could not he show his hand openly?"

"That's his secret."

"No man should have secrets from his wife," said the mother, oracularly.

"I believe all mother-in-laws indorse that rule," replied Felix. "For my part, I think it a little too sweeping. In the present case, the long and short of the matter is that it doesn't matter a fig whether Sibyl is informed or not. I confess I don't see why Stanhope should make such a fuss about it. But then, I don't insist on everybody being cut after my pattern."

Failing to make any thing out of her son, Mrs. Cornish called upon Long Jack in his place of business. The ex-gambler was surprised to see her, but received her courteously.

"Mr. Boardman," she began, "I hope that you will not hold me responsible for your treatment this morning. I have come to ask you to produce at once the evidence in support of your accusation which will arrest Felix's attention—"

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Cornish," interrupted Long Jack. "While I assure you of my esteem, yet I cannot break my resolve. Both your son and daughter have treated me with contempt. Perhaps this time next year they will be in a different frame of mind."

"But, sir, will you not regard a mother's anxiety for her daughter? Consider a girl's impulsiveness."

"Madam," said Long Jack, "my experience goes to show that nobody considers any thing but their own interests. I do not care a fig for your daughter's marriage with Egbert Stanhope, nor for its consequences; but I do care whether your son marries Miss Stanhope, and in time to prevent it I shall place in your hands all the evidence you require. If you care to save your son from giving to his children for a mother the sister of a forger, you will be in New Orleans on the first day of next December, and have Mr. Stanhope and his wife invited to spend the holidays here in Memphis."

That was Long Jack's ultimatum.

The wedding came off in due form.

Sibyl was somewhat nervous. Egbert was like a man in a dream.

Adele made a model little bridemaid; and Felix, on his part, captivated all the feminine portion of the "dear five hundred" under twenty years of age.

Then the carriage rolled away, followed by a perfect shower of slippers, and, for good or ill, Sibyl Cornish had lost her identity in Mrs. Egbert Stanhope.

Adele stayed with the Cornishes, and Felix consoled her for the loss of her brother.

Then in the balmy May-time they all went North, to meet the bride and groom on their return from their wedding tour.

When Adele nestled in her brother's arms, she was all sobs and tears and smiles and kisses and sunny hair, after the manner of little blonde witches. And Egbert petted her in his gravely tender way, and told her how there had been a vacancy in his heart that even Sibyl could not fill.

Then Adele declared that she was going to have him one day all to herself, and dragged him off in triumph.

Felix took the mistress of Oakdale by the shoulders and looked her over critically, while she smiled in his face, defying criticism.

"Well, sis," was the verdict, "I see no reason to believe that he is such a terrible Blue Beard, after all."

"Felix," said the young wife, her eyes humid, and her voice tremulous with emotion, "I never dreamed of such happiness. My every wish is anticipated. He has no thought for anything except in its relation to my comfort and enjoyment. My only wish is to make myself worthy of such devotion."

For once even a mother-in-law's solicitude could pick no flaw. But Mrs. Cornish looked askant at the gloved hand, and bided her time.

And so the long summer passed, and the ties which bound the little circle grew closer.

The sweet, clinging disposition of Adele was just suited to easy-going Felix. He wanted some one to worship him, while he played the Grand Sultan, accepting it all as if it was his due; and in return he would never let her know an hour of sorrow.

And Adele made a great baby of him, to his and her heart's content. They did not know that in knitting their hearts so closely together they were fitting themselves to suffer all the more keenly in the near future.

Meanwhile, Sibyl was clothed with the sanctity of impending motherhood.

Egbert hung over her with a new tenderness, and marked the wondering, half-startled love that was growing in her eyes. Under this hallowed influence even Mrs. Cornish yielded somewhat, and seeing his unvarying gentleness, began to do him something like justice.

Then, just before the winter's chill began to steal through the air, came the *denouement*, and Sibyl wore her crown of maternity with that proud elation which is so touching in young mothers.

At such a time the heart of the mother-in-law might have foregone its purpose; but there came a letter, saying:

"It will make no essential difference whether you keep our appointment or not. If you do, you will be at the immediate source of information. If you do not, I shall make use of sworn statements. I should think, however that you would leave no precaution untried to protect the direct line of Cornishes from such contamination."

Then all the pride of the mother rose. Whatever had befallen Sibyl, if there was any truth in this persistent accusation, Felix must be protected from such an alliance.

On the following day she announced that she was worn out and desired a trip South. She had everything arranged. Felix was to accompany her, leaving Adele to prepare her wedding *trousseau* in her own home. The mother and son would extend their trip as far South as New Orleans, returning to Memphis by the middle of December, in time to receive the Stanhopes. After the holidays the whole party would again go North long enough to see Adele married.

The parting between Felix and Adele was marked on her part by badinage in the presence of others, and "a good cry" when they were alone together.

When they had exchanged vows of daily correspondence, and arranged to look at the moon at a certain hour each evening and think of each other—when she had enjoined him again and again to be a good boy and not get himself into mischief when she was not by to take care of him—when the very last words had been said, and he was really gone, she went to her room for another "good cry" and to begin the first one of the promised series of letters.

Being a man, Felix got himself in a comfortable position with his feet higher than his head, buried his nose in the last *Tribune*, and was negatively happy—that is to say, there was nothing to trouble him.

In spite of alleged presentiments, we approach the crisis of our lives unwarned. The bolt falls from a cloudless sky!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIRST OF DECEMBER.

ON the first day of December a man entered the St. Charles Hotel, New Orleans, and examined the register until he came to the name

"FELIX CORNISH, MEMPHIS, TENN."

"MRS. A. J. CORNISH, "

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with a smile of satisfaction, "my lady is promptness personified. Now, Felix, my dear fellow, let us see who wins."

Sauntering into the billiard-room, he saw Felix just beginning a game.

"Good!" he muttered. "You're out of the way a sufficient length of time for me to transact my business. Now, Mrs. Cornish, I am at your service!"

He sent up his card by an attendant, and without delay was ushered into Mrs. Cornish's private parlor.

Long Jack bowed low as the lady advanced to meet him, looking a little flushed.

Before he had recovered from his obeisance, his attention was attracted by a smothered ejaculation, and looking up he discovered M. Bourdoine, bristling to the tips of his mustaches, and looking gimlets at him.

M. Bourdoine's forlorn hope had brought him to New Orleans, and the publication of the Cornishes' names among the hotel arrivals had attracted him to the St. Charles, he putting up at a much less pretentious hotel.

Mrs. Cornish had forgotten all about the brief passage-at arms between Long Jack and the little Frenchman. Hence this *rencontre mal a propos*.

"Madame Corneesh," said M. Bourdoine, with vast dignity, "I crave your permission to withdraw. Eet vill afford me ze pleasair inestimable to pay my respect ven you shall note be engaged."

"But, Mr. Bourdoine," cried the lady, "I rely upon your assistance in a matter with Mr. Boardman. I have been congratulating myself on your opportune arrival."

"Madame," said the Frenchman, placing his hand on his heart, "I beg you to believe zat I am wholly devoted to you, and zat I would do all zat I can in honor to serve you. Bote I cannot consent to meet ze gentleman until he shall apologize."

Mrs. Cornish looked bewildered.

Long Jack smothered a laugh.

"Oh! Monsieur Bourdoine," he said, in as serious a tone as he could command, "I am not so tenacious of ill feeling that I could see the lady inconvenienced. My rancor yields to my gallantry. Sir, I apologize for the offense given you this time last year!"

Whether or not M. Bourdoine was sufficiently master of English to detect the irony that underlay Long Jack's words, at any rate, he replied, with a stiff bow:

"Monsieur, it is sufficient!" and took a seat.

"Mrs. Cornish," said Jack, assuming a business air, "I am here to redeem my pledge!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DAMNING RECORD.

Mrs. Cornish was pale and nervous, but she invited her guest to take a seat opposite her.

Long Jack drew from his pocket two old newspapers, dating back nineteen years, and spread them out on the table before Mrs. Cornish, so as to bring marked passages under her eye.

Mrs. Cornish adjusted her eyeglasses, and read:

"A REMARKABLE CASE OF YOUTHFUL PERVERSITY.

"\$10,000 FORGERY!

"A BOLD GAME BY A NOVICE IN CRIME.

"Last evening, some time after banking hours, the attention of Cashier Rowan, of the Bank of New Orleans, was called to a check, drawn by Messrs. Branscom & Co., shippers, and purporting to bear the indorsement of Messrs. Edmonds & Craig, the wealthy cotton-brokers. Upon re-examination, after the hurry of business was over, the teller thought he detected something peculiar about the latter signature.

"A consultation of the bank officials was immediately held, and after collating the suspected signature and several of undoubted genuineness then in the bank, the uneasiness was so much increased that the president, cashier and teller concluded to wait upon the firm and either confirm or dispel their fears.

"Though the indorsement was (apparently) in the handwriting of the senior partner, Mr. Craig's residence being nearer he was called upon first. Mr. Craig said that the check had been received that day, but he had understood that it was to be carried for five or six days as a matter of convenience to Messrs. Branscom & Co.

"Mr. Edmonds was found suffering from a severe cold. He had been present at the negotiations involving the check, but had gone home before the paper was sent to his office, so that he had never seen it.

"The persons now in demand were Messrs. Edmonds & Craig's chief clerk, Mr. Paul Harney, who was in sole charge during Mr. Edmonds's absence, and the messenger boy, Charles J. Wells, who had presented the check, among several others, at the bank, and received the cash.

"Mr. Harney was called from festivities of no less importance than his sister's wedding; and the smile of pleased surprise with which he received his unexpected employers was changed to a look of dismay when he learned the nature of their visit. He declared that he had no knowledge of the check being out of their safe; he was sure it was not among those he had that day sent to the bank, and young Wells had certainly given him no account of the ten thousand dollars.

"The whole party now went to the residence of Mrs. Wells, relict of the late Dr. Compton Wells, long known professionally and socially in the best circles of our city.

"Young Wells had not been home since morning!

"The police were now called into requisition, and Messrs. Edmonds & Craig began to gather new light on the character and habits of their employee. Thus far he seems to have been accepted on the known high standing of his family. It now transpired that he moved with a circle of fast young men, who were more a source of anxiety than of honor to their respective parents.

"Just before midnight young Wells was found in a state of intoxication at Larry Mackey's, where he had been put to bed after a night of unusual carousal. On his person was found between two and three hundred dollars, and it was ascertained that he had been spending money freely all the evening.

"With some difficulty the young man—or, rather, boy, for he is only seventeen years old—was sufficiently sobered to converse intelligently, when he declared that the check had been given to him by the chief clerk, Mr. Harney, and that he had returned the money, ten thousand dollars, to him. The money found on his person he accounted for as having been won from a companion—John Boardman by name.

"The youth Boardman, of twenty years or thereabouts, was next hunted up, and proved to be a young man about town, living on his parents, his father being a wholesale liquor dealer of the firm of Welsh & Boardman. This young hopeful admitted that Wells had won money from him, but in amount less than seventeen dollars. He had been with Wells all the evening, while the latter was treating the boys, but supposed that it was on this money. Knew nothing of Wells having any greater amount.

"Wells professes to have been under the influence of wine, and unable to determine how much he won of Boardman. Was himself surprised at the amount found on him, but persistently denies having received any except that won from Boardman, and between ten and twelve dollars with which he began the evening.

"The ugliest feature for young Wells, discovered last night, was the fact that a package of one hundred dollars was still held by a paper band bearing the mark '100' in pencil, which the teller identified as his own work.

"At the preliminary examination, this morning, it appeared that Wells is an expert penman, and was once warned by Mr. Craig of the danger of imitating signatures, even for amusement.

"Wells was bound over for trial, and the most expert detectives have been employed to try to recover the money.

"It is believed that older heads than the messenger boy's are at the bottom of this bold piece of rascality, and he has been offered every inducement to turn State's evidence, and reveal his accomplices, but only reiterates his first story, that the check was given to him by Mr. Harney, and the money returned to Mr. Harney by him.

"The high character of Mr. Harney and the weight of the evidence amply protect him from suspicion. His employers scout the idea of his betraying the trust reposed in him, and pay him the highest tribute for probity and thorough reliability.

"The meeting between young Wells and his mother was painful in the extreme. He gave her the most sacred pledges of his innocence, and she believes him implicitly."

The second article ran:

"THE BOY FORGER!

"CHARLES J. WELLS

IS SENTENCED TO

"TWO YEARS' IMPRISONMENT

AND

"BRANDING IN THE PALM!"

These display lines were followed by an account of the trial, which was a virtual recapitulation of the facts set forth in the preceding article, nothing new having been developed.

"Well," said Mrs. Cornish, when she had read both articles, "what has the forgery of the boy Wells to do with the man Stanhope?"

"A very pertinent question, madam," replied Long Jack, suavely. "Will you oblige me by glancing at this third article?"

And he produced another paper, in which was announced "a marriage in high life," between Mrs. Elizabeth Wells, "widow of our quondam esteemed fellow-citizen, Dr. Compton Wells," and Col. Egbert Stanhope, of England.

"Well?" asked Mrs. Cornish, growing paler and trembling perceptibly.

"Madam," said Long Jack, "I am the John Boardman of the account you have just read. Do you need any further indication to recognize our friend Egbert?"

Mrs. Cornish was overcome with conviction.

"I would have averted it, but Felix was so headstrong," she said, with some show of motherly feeling blended with wounded family

pride. "That my daughter should be so degraded!"

"Madam," said Long Jack, "it is not too late for Mr. Cornish to rectify his error in part. I—"

"One moment!" interrupted the lady, nervously. "I must have Monsieur Bourdoine's opinion on this before we broach the subject to Felix."

Long Jack bowed and walked to the window, while Mrs. Cornish passed the papers to the Frenchman, who had been waiting with ill-concealed impatience.

M. Bourdoine read the articles with a running fire of ejaculations:

"Ah, Dieu!"—"Morableu!"—"Grand ciel!"—"Par St. Denis!"

When he had finished, he leaped to his feet, crumpled the paper in his hand and waved it above his head tragically, crying:

"*A bas ce coquin maudit!* (down with the accursed rascal!) *Ah! grace de Dieu!* vat misfortune have befallen my hapless pupil! *Sibylle* unhappy! who shall you revenge? *Ah! Madame Corneesh!* my benefactress, my friend! accept ze commiseration of vone heart afflict vis ze calamite incalculable zat have fallen upon your house!"

What more he might have poured forth was checked by the opening of the door.

Felix Cornish stood on the threshold!

CHAPTER XIX.

A STUNNING BLOW.

ON entering the room Felix first discovered M. Bourdoine, and with a look of pleased surprise advanced to greet him.

"Ah! my old friend," he cried, "this is indeed an unexpected pleasure. What set of the tide of Fortune has brought us together again in this corner of the republic?"

"Oh, Monsieur Felix!" cried the Frenchman, in his most dolorous strain. "Helas! ze Providence inscrutable shall mete out to each his portion of woe! Ze moan of distress shall mingle vis ze echo of ze laughter joyeux!"

Felix was too familiar with M. Bourdoine's rhapsodies to be greatly shocked; so repressing the inclination to smile at the Frenchman's rueful face, he assumed a look of decorous sympathy, and replied:

"M. Bourdoine, must I again condole with you for failure to find Ma'am'selle Helene? Fortune is hard upon you, my friend."

"Ah, ciel!" cried the Frenchman, appealing to Mrs. Cornish in dismay. "He is unconscious! He have no foreshadowing of ze dread calamite! *Mater Dei!* sustain him! *Ah! mon pauvre ami!* (my poor friend!) eet is note my humble misfortune zat make my heart bleed! No! no! eet is— *Ah! Madame Corneesh,* tell him—you!"

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Felix, now noticing his mother's agitation.

"Felix," stammered the lady, "you have not observed that—our friend—M. Boardman is present."

Felix turned round with a stare of surprise, which became a look of keen displeasure when he discovered Long Jack standing at the window.

"Well, sir," he said, pale with anger, "to what do we owe the honor of your visit?"

"Felix! Felix!" admonished Mrs. Cornish, "hear him before you condemn. He is a better friend to you than you think."

"Mr. Cornish," said Long Jack, now coming forward, "there is wisdom in your mother's advice. I am a better friend to you and yours than you think—better than you would deserve, were not your very injustice to me prompted by motives of generosity which do credit to you."

"I beg of you, sir, to come to the point," replied Felix, starchy. "What is your business?"

"Sir," said Long Jack, keeping his temper, "one year ago you spurned my interference when I would have saved your sister from sorrow, your family from dishonor, and yourself from humiliation and vain regrets. To-day I have laid before your mother and your friend, here, indisputable proofs of the truth of my accusation. If they are not sufficient for you, I am prepared to back them up by the records of the Court of Oyer and Terminer, and by the testimony of living witnesses."

"Felix, listen to him. It is all true," interposed Mrs. Cornish, giving way to tears.

In rather stogy denunciation, Long Jack continued, before Felix could speak:

"I accuse Egbert Stanhope of having been tried and convicted of forgery, and of having been branded in the palm with the letter F. By

whatever means he diverted you from investigation, I know that he did not show you the palm of his right hand; for I myself saw it branded as I have described."

By this time Felix was beyond the power of speech. There was a terrible conflict going on in his mind.

"By Heaven! he *did* not show me his palm!" was the thought that shot through his brain like a poisoned dart. "What if I have been deceived! Sibyl, my dear sister, have I brought this indelible disgrace upon you?"

"Here, sir, is a part of the proofs," said Long Jack, extending the papers to Felix.

"*Evidence la plus (most) damnable!*" interposed M. Bourdoine, with the ferocious aspect of an enraged grenadier.

"Oblige me by satisfying yourself," pursued Long Jack.

Felix took the paper mechanically. Then before his mind rose the phantom of a white, scared, appealing face—a face of exquisitely delicate lineaments, framed in gold blonde hair.

At that a spasm contracted his heart. With an inarticulate cry of pain he hurled the papers from him.

"Take your proofs and yourself out of my presence!" he commanded, hoarsely. "This accused inquisition shall go no further."

"*Grace de ciel!* you cannot mean it!" vociferated M. Bourdoine, in dismay.

"The man is infatuated!" cried Long Jack.

But now Mrs. Cornish's turn was come. She rose to her feet, with an artificial strength of purpose, born of a sense of outraged pride. Standing pale but resolute, she said:

"Felix, I need not say that I am surprised by your strange conduct in this matter. Once before I submitted, and to your rejection of the truth our family name owes the first stain that has fallen upon it, while my daughter's whole life has been blasted. Now, having myself seen the proofs, I am resolved to act! Do you think that I will permit my daughter to remain the dupe of that infamous scoundrel—that branded felon?"

Felix had sunk into a chair, and bowed his head upon the table. He now started up, crying:

"Desist, mother. By unearthing the buried past you can but bring unutterable wretchedness upon her, where now she is happy in her ignorance."

"Hear him!" cried the lady, indignantly, appealing to M. Bourdoine, Long Jack, and, doubtless, to the invisible spirit of outraged justice. "Here is the new code of expediency! You think then that it is better to live in this infamous infamy than to suffer in repelling this deadly insult? If my son is made of such sordid stuff, I have a higher opinion of my daughter's self-respect!"

"Perhaps the bitter pill is swallowed for the sake of its sugar coating!" sneered Long Jack, his eyes glittering with snake-like venom.

The lady uttered a cry, understanding him at once.

"Felix!" she exclaimed, seizing him by the shoulder, "is it possible that you are willing to sell your sister to this wretch, in order that you may gratify your base-born passion for his sister? You are no son of mine—"

But Felix leaped to his feet as if stung.

"No!" he cried. "I am not the first Cornish to lose sight of honor! You are right—it is better to wring her heart, if need be, than to leave her within the contaminating influence of a criminal—a common prison-bird—a man branded like a slave! You are right again—her pride would not count it a kindness to be left even in happiness, linked to such a wretch."

"But how can I atone? My God! will she ever forgive me?"

He covered his white face with his hands and groaned aloud.

"Felix," cried his mother, "now I recognize my son! You cannot redeem the past, but you can avenge this monstrous wrong."

"Yes! and will, too!" cried the unhappy brother, with clenched hands and blazing eyes.

"Look, you, sirrah!" he pursued, hotly, fairly shaking his fist in Long Jack's face, "if this charge is true, I will have Egbert Stanhope's blood! If it is not true—and I promise you there shall be no missing link of doubt—curse you! I'll shoot you like a dog!"

"Now, where are your proofs?"

CHAPTER XX.

MR. CRAIG'S TESTIMONY.

LONG JACK was nothing daunted by the belligerent attitude of Felix. Bowing quietly, he again presented the papers.

"Well," said Felix, when he had read the articles relative to the forgery, "you undertake

to prove that this boy Wells and Egbert Stanhope are the same?"

"Exactly."

And Jack laid before him the notice of the marriage.

Felix frowned, but said:

"Here is a missing link. Col. Stanhope may have had a son by a former marriage."

"With the peculiarity of hiding his hands!" sneered Long Jack.

"With the peculiarity of hiding his hands!" repeated Felix, sternly, "and from perfectly honorable cause."

"Well, I am prepared to meet that," said the gambler—for Jack had returned to his former mode of life.

"How?"

"By the testimony of living witnesses. In the first place, you will recognize in me the John Boardman in the newspaper account."

"Yes—you seem to have preserved your identity, morally as well as physically!" sneered Felix.

Long Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"To adapt the comfortable doctrine of Mrs. Vicar of Wakefield," he laughed, "we're as the Lord made us!"

"Pray proceed with your proof!" urged Felix, impatiently.

"As John Boardman, then, I am personally and intimately acquainted with Charles J. Wells, alias Egbert Stanhope!"

Felix winced at the thrust underlying Long Jack's words; and Mrs. Cornish cried:

"Oh! that I should live to see a daughter of mine married under an assumed name!"

"Excuse me if I require corroboration to your testimony," said Felix, in reply to Long Jack.

"Quite proper, sir, under the circumstances. And you shall have it."

"It must be unimpeachable."

"No less trustworthy than that of Messrs. Craig & Harney—the senior partner, Mr. Edmonds, having died, and the chief clerk having been admitted to partnership with the survivor."

"How can they identify Mr. Stanhope, he not being here to be seen?"

"A very pertinent question, sir, and quite easily answered. Mr. Craig was intimately acquainted with Mrs. Wells—in fact, but for Mr. Stanhope he might have had hopes of making her Mrs. Craig. And it was this friendship which secured young Wells his position."

"Well?"

"He was also personally acquainted with Dr. Wells, and after him with Col. Stanhope. He knows the latter to have had the reputation, at least of being a bachelor, and consequently not likely to have a son whom he would recognize and associate with his daughter, whose life—"

"All of which is very good so far as it goes," interrupted Felix, impatiently. "But, sir, your premises are rather shaky."

"Waiving that, then, suppose it were to be established that the Egbert of our acquaintance bears a striking resemblance to the lamented Dr. Wells, while Adele—"

"Miss Stanhope, if you please!"

"I beg your pardon! While Miss Stanhope as strongly resembles the gallant colonel, the brother and sister having some features in common, would it not appear that the link was through the mother?"

"How recently has Mr. Craig seen the brother and sister?"

"The former not far nineteen years—the latter never."

"Then how can he tell whom they resemble?"

"I am the fortunate possessor of a daguerreotype of the individuals."

"You have a likeness of Miss Stanhope? How did you become possessed of it? I demand it, sir, instantly!"

"All in good time. If you wish it after it has answered its purpose, you shall have it."

"But how did you get it?"

"I was shrewd enough to foresee this exigency, not to mention a predilection for the original of the effigy, and, let us say, confiscated it! Now, sir, I purpose to submit this daguerreotype to the examination of the ancient lover; and you will have the benefit of his unbiased judgment."

"When can we see this gentleman?"

"Immediately."

"Very well, sir; I attend you. Lead the way."

Felix got his hat.

"My son, may I not accompany you?" asked Mrs. Cornish.

"Mother, you may trust me now. However this eventuates, I am determined to see the palm of Egbert Stanhope's hand!"

"M. Bourdoine, as you have been present during the whole of this affair, I shall be glad of your company, if agreeable to you."

"*Merci!* (thanks!) my friend. Pray command me."

The gentlemen went out together, and fifteen minutes later entered the office of the cotton-broker.

"Are Messrs. Craig & Harney in?" asked Long Jack of the messenger-boy in the outer office.

"Mr. Craig is in his private office," was the reply. "Mr. Harney has not yet returned from the Exchange."

"Conduct us to Mr. Craig."

The boy led the way through to an inner office where sat a man of perhaps sixty years of age. He looked like one who had led a tranquil life, but in his eyes there was a shade of melancholy or regret.

"Mr. Craig," said Long Jack, when they had been courteously received and seated, "allow me to introduce myself as John Boardman, and my friends—"

"Excuse me," interrupted Felix, haughtily.

"For myself not your friend!"

Mr. Craig started in mild surprise.

Long Jack laughed lightly, to mask the real annoyance he felt.

"A designation of no importance," he said. "These gentlemen are Mr. Cornish, of Memphis, and M. Bourdoine—a cosmopolite, I take it."

Mr. Craig acknowledged the introduction, and waited for the development of the business of his unexpected guests.

"Mr. Craig," began Jack, "I must ask you to go back twenty years to a messenger-boy named Charles J. Wells. Did you employ such a one?"

Mr. Craig started and turned slightly pale.

"Yes," he replied.

"He was convicted of forgery as set forth in these papers, published at that time?"

Long Jack laid the papers before the broker.

"He was so convicted," admitted Mr. Craig, compressing his lips, as if in pain.

"And branded in the palm with the letter F., the rigor of the law being executed upon him because of his obstinate refusal to betray his accomplices or give any clue to the money?"

"Yes, sir."

"In consequence of which not a penny was ever recovered?"

"None was recovered, except what was found on his person."

"Now, sir, you were intimately acquainted with the mother of the boy Wells?"

Again a shadow of pain flitted across the face of the old gentleman. He seemed to struggle a moment; then he said:

"May I ask the purpose of these questions, sir?"

"It is my wish to fix the identity of the boy, now grown to manhood, and to prevent his imposing upon an honorable family whom he is now seeking to deceive."

After a moment Mr. Craig said:

"I knew his mother."

"And her first husband, Dr. Wells?"

"I was acquainted with him for years."

"She subsequently married a Colonel Stanhope?"

"Yes."

"Were you acquainted with him, so that you remember his personal appearance?"

"Perfectly."

"Do you know anything of the Stanhopes subsequent to this marriage? Was there any offspring?"

"She had a daughter."

"Named—"

"Adele."

"Good!" cried Jack, radiantly. "We are getting on better than I expected. Now, sir, do you know whether Colonel Stanhope had a son by any marriage previous to his union with Mrs. Wells?"

"He was a bachelor, sir."

"The boy Wells was confined in prison two years?"

"Yes."

"What became of him after that?"

"I know nothing further of him."

"You do not know whether he lived in the house of his step-father?"

"No. Colonel Stanhope left New Orleans about the time the boy's term in prison expired."

"To go North?"

"I do not know. I have lost all track of him and his family for seventeen years."

"Now, sir, can you give us any idea what sort of a man Dr. Wells was?"

"He was tall and of commanding presence."

with dark hair and eyes, straight nose, firm mouth, and a chin indicative of resolution."

"Was he a man calculated to influence women strongly?"

"I believe that he owed much of his professional success to his magnetic power over the opposite sex."

"Thank you. Can you now describe Colonel Stanhope?"

"He was the antipodes of Dr. Wells. He was much smaller, with light hair and blue eyes. He lacked the dignity of the other man, but was so full of stirring, vigorous life that he too easily impressed his will upon others."

"Excuse me for trespassing on your patience so long. I am nearly done. Lastly, what sort of a woman was Mrs. Wells, afterward Mrs. Stanhope?"

A change passed over Mr. Craig's face. He cleared his throat, as if to relieve that constriction caused by painful memories. He drew his silk handkerchief across his eyes and forehead, and then rubbed it in his hands.

When he spoke, his voice was low, with a cadence of tender sadness.

"She was a woman of exquisite gentleness, all of whose life was in her love," he said.

Felix thought of Adele, and could hardly repress a groan.

"In person," pursued the old man, with a far-away look in his eyes, as if he were describing the phantom his recollection conjured up before him—"in person she was remarkable for delicacy, elegance, refinement. I don't know that I make myself clear; but there are women who in dress and demeanor impress one as the impersonation of a poem. She was to humanity what *Parian marble* is to art."

But here the old gentleman suddenly checked himself and actually blushed faintly. Strangers could have little sympathy with his heart-pictures.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said. "Of course you have only to do with her physical appearance. She was rather small, with brown hair of a medium shade, and gray eyes."

"Sir, your descriptions have more than met my expectations," said Long Jack.

He then produced from his pocket a daguerreotype case, of the style common twenty years ago. Opening it, he screened half the likeness by holding a piece of paper over it, leaving revealed the picture of Adele Stanhope.

At sight of this Felix trembled with anger and pain, and could scarcely restrain the impulse to snatch it from Long Jack's hand.

"What do you think of this picture?" asked the gambler, extending it toward Mr. Craig.

The old gentleman wiped his spectacles and gazed at it in silence, until his eyes grew humid.

"Is it her daughter?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Yes. Does it resemble her?"

"In expression, yes. There is all the gentleness and sensitiveness. Physically she is as much a reproduction of the father as the difference of sex would permit. She has his features exquisitely refined."

"Now, sir, what do you think of this?" And Long Jack drew the paper from before Egbert, who was represented seated, while Adele leaned with her peculiar grace on his shoulder.

"It is her boy," said the old man, in a tone of sadness. "He is the image of his father at that age. She would never be convinced of his guilt; and perhaps it was better so; it would have killed her to believe him unworthy. It is given to few of us to be loved as she loved!"

And the sigh that arose to his lips was only partly repressed.

Felix arose, looking stern and pale.

"Mr. Craig," he said, "this is sufficient. We need not longer trespass upon your time. You have done me a service which I cannot hope to requite—I can only thank you."

But here the office-boy stuck his head in at the door and said:

"Mr. Harney, sir."

A strange smile came to Long Jack's lips, but instantly disappeared.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. PAUL HARNEY.

IN the doorway stood a man of perhaps fifty years of age. There was a stoop in his shoulders, so that he never held his head erect. He looked out from under his brows with restless eyes; and he had a trick, too, of rubbing his hands one over the other, as if he were washing them.

The characteristic expression of his face was weakness, which was heightened by his sallow complexion.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Craig—"my partner, Mr. Harney. These gentlemen are Mr. Boardman—Mr. Cornish—M. Bourdoine."

Mr. Harney had cast one glance round the room, and his bilious countenance had turned a dirty gray. He now acknowledged the introduction with a silent bow.

"Sir, your coming is very opportune," said Long Jack, advancing and extending his hand cordially. "I can hardly consider myself a total stranger to you, though it is now nearly twenty years since I had the honor of meeting you. The dead Past never seems to bury its dead, Mr. Harney. At the most unexpected time and in the most extraordinary way things long forgotten are again dragged to the surface."

"But before apprising you of our business, may I submit to your examination a daguerreotype?"

Mr. Harney had yielded his hand to Long Jack, rather than taken that of the gambler. While the latter was speaking, the eyes of the former had wandered from and returned to the face of his interlocutor with that uneasiness betrayed by animals when steadfastly gazed at.

Having seated himself, with his elbows resting on the arms of his chair, he took the daguerreotype and seemed to study it carefully.

"Do you recognize either of the persons?" asked Long Jack.

Mr. Harney shook his head slowly from side to side.

"No," he said, reflectively. "I know no such faces."

"Go back twenty—thirty years."

A pause, and then:

"I can recall no such persons. It is a long way back, sir. And yet—I do not know—there seems something—No. I must have forgotten, if I ever knew such persons."

"There was a messenger boy guilty of forgery—"

"Ah!"

Long Jack stopped at the sudden interruption, and waited for his hint to work its effect.

Mr. Harney bent more closely over the picture. After a moment, he moistened his lips with his tongue, and then said in a monotonous tone:

"That was a sad case, sir. Is this the picture of Charles Wells? I think I now see a resemblance to his father, who did not live to be pained by his son's fall."

"That is all I require, sir. It is the picture of Charles J. Wells. It is but fair to you to say that your identification of him may go to frustrate an attempt to insinuate himself into an unsuspecting family as an honest man."

Jack spoke with quiet deliberateness, looking straight at Mr. Harney.

The latter fumbled amid some papers, coughed behind his hand, and then resumed the wringing or washing motion.

"But the brand in his palm?" he said, constrainedly. "I should think it an insuperable obstacle."

"He cleverly hides it beneath a kid glove, and affects an elegance of attire whose aim is to divest of singularity, as much as may be, the unusual habit of being gloved on all occasions."

Here Felix arose, much disturbed.

"Pray let us bring this to a close," he said.

"Gentlemen, allow me to thank you once more."

"But stay! one question, if you please. Had this Charles Wells any other mark on his right hand?"

"No, no other mark," replied both of the gentlemen.

"A birthmark, covering the third and fourth fingers?"

"Certainly not," asserted Messrs. Craig & Harney.

"Ah! a birthmark!" muttered Long Jack, elevating his brows.

"Then, by Heaven!" began Felix, but choking with emotion, he left off and started toward the door.

The confined air of the room seemed as if it would stifle him.

M. Bourdoine sprung to his side, opened the door and accompanied him to the street.

"Monsieur Corneesh, I am vis you heart and soul!" declared the melodramatic Frenchman.

"Ah, Dieu! shall we note revenge soche treachery! *Quelle Diablerie!* (what fiend's-work!) my pupil ze victim—"

"Oh, stop! for God's sake!" cried Felix, wrought to distraction.

Long Jack had delayed to take leave of Messrs. Craig & Harney. He held the hand of the latter while he said:

"The same treachery which led the boy to seek to shift his crime to your shoulders, Mr. Harney, has marked the course of the man. But a just Providence always intervenes to prevent the wicked from prospering. Honest men would be hopelessly at the mercy of sharpers, but for this Omnipotent aid."

There was a strange smile, rather about his eyes than his lips, as he gazed at the old cotton-broker.

The dirty gray pallor returned to Mr. Harney's cheeks, as he bowed assent.

Passing through the outer office, Long Jack indulged in a quiet chuckle.

"Well," he said, when he rejoined M. Bourdoine and Felix on the street, "do you wish the picture?"

"Most assuredly, yes!" said Felix, almost snatching it from his hand. "It has served your purpose well!"

"I am satisfied with the result," said Long Jack, complacently. "I have kept my word—have I not?—and satisfied you that Charles J. Wells, *alias* Egbert Stan—"

"Sir! spare me any discussion of this matter! You say that you are satisfied with your infamous work. Let it rest, then."

"I believe that a juster designation might be selected for what I have done. However, I am not strenuous on that point. But this slight return, at least, you will not deny me, for having given you an opportunity to transmit to the future line of Cornishes unimpaired cause for pride in—"

"Have a care!" cried Felix, stopping short with blazing eyes and quivering nostrils. "One word against the woman whose picture you have polluted by having it in your possession, and I will shoot you down in your tracks."

With his wonderful self-possession, Long Jack betrayed no sign of being startled by this outburst; but he quietly cocked the pistol which he carried in his pantaloons pocket, so that it seldom parted company with his hand.

Bowing coolly, he said:

"Far be it from me to say aught derogatory of a lady whom I esteem as highly as you can—"

"Avoid all reference to her, sir. Commendation from your lips is as distasteful as detraction."

Long Jack's eyes glittered at this repeated snubbing, but he kept his temper. He had an object to attain.

"I return to my request," he said, quietly.

"What is it?" snapped Felix.

"That I may be allowed to be present when you call Charles J. Wells, *alias* Egbert Stanhope, to account for the fraud he practiced upon you a year ago."

The double shot went straight home—the deception and the assumed name.

Felix ground his teeth with rage.

"Oh! the infamous scoundrel!" he muttered.

"And he duped me—blind fool!"—so easily with his shallow pretense of sensitiveness! By Heaven! I'll match his birthmark with a death-mark about which there will be no sham!"

After waiting a few moments, while Felix held fierce self-communion, Long Jack asked:

"May I consider my request granted?"

"Yes, and more! I desire your presence."

"Ah! But I confess I do not see why you should particularly desire it."

"Common justice, for one thing. I insulted you, thinking that I had cause. It is meet that the apology be made in the presence of those who witnessed the affront."

Long Jack came near whistling with surprise. Here was Roman justice with a vengeance. It took him some time to digest the new aspect of affairs. Gradually he came to see it in the light of an additional humiliation to Egbert, perhaps, rather than amends to himself.

Presently he asked:

"Where do you wish my attendance?"

"At Riverside."

"When?"

"The fifteenth of this month."

"At what time of day?"

Felix reflected a moment.

"The heat is due at noon. Allow an hour to reach Riverside. Another hour to the toilet after travel."

Aloud he said:

"At two in the afternoon."

"I will be punctual."

A pause of a moment, and Long Jack said:

"I presume I can be of no further use to you now?"

"None whatever!" replied Felix, with a heartiness that imparted its meaning to the words.

"Then, sir, until the fifteenth!"

The gambler raised his hat with mock courtesy, a sneering smile on his lips.

"M. Bourdoine, *au revoir!*"

And he departed.

CHAPTER XXII.

HONOR VS. LOVE.

A LOW, mocking laugh from the gambler's

hips reached Felix Cornish's ears. In his humiliation and pain the lover rested his hand upon M. Bourdoine's shoulder. Here, at least, was a true friend.

"Ah! *mon ami*," murmured the Frenchman, "heed not *ze* jeer of *ze* rascal. He is *bote* *ze* instrument of justice. *Parbleu!* shall *ve* quarrel vis *ze* pot because of *ze* smut!—*bote* *ve* shall have no *ragout* visout *ze* pot!"

Felix's mind was too much occupied to profit by this bit of Bourdoinean philosophy.

"*Monsieur*," he said, "may I ask you a favor?"

"*Certainement!*"

"I cannot see my mother in this matter. I must ask you to go to her, and tell her what has transpired."

"I am rejoiced at an opportunity to serve you. I will relieve you of all embarrassment."

"Tell her that we start home by the next boat."

"And, *mon ami*, shall not I accompany you? *Sang-dieu!* I shall participate in *ze* revenge of *ze* injury execrable! Ah! *ma chere Sibylle!* zat have twine *ze* tendrils of affection around my heart."

"M. Bourdoine, will you come?"

Touched by this mark of friendship, Felix spoke earnestly and grasped the hand of the Frenchman.

"Ah! will I not?" cried M. Bourdoine. "*Grace de dieu!* do I live *bote* for *ze* service of my pupil?"

Together they returned to the hotel, and while M. Bourdoine sought Mrs. Cornish, Felix went to his own room to wrestle with the greatest affliction that had fallen upon his sunny life.

From his pocket he drew the daguerreotype which he had received from Long Jack. While he gazed at it he shuddered.

"Not they must not remain side by side," he said. "My love for her would be ever clouded by my hatred of him. She, at least, is pure, though he is vile."

With his knife he removed the glass and carefully scratched away every portion of Egbert's face and figure, before replacing it in the case.

"That is typical," he muttered, as he contemplated the altered picture. "At her side there is a spot as black as ink. So shall I blot him out of existence!"

He clenched his fist with anger; but suddenly he reflected:

"And then! What becomes of her love? Can she forgive the man who has slain her brother? Which does she love most?"

He turned pale with sudden dread.

"Adele! Adele!" he moaned, with his hands over his white face, "must I crush your heart? Must I kill your love?"

He rose and began to pace the room furiously.

Said the tempter:

"You cannot redeem the past. Why spoil your own future? What is required of you? You condone this one evil, and spare yourself, your sister, and Adele—who is innocent of all blame—lives of misery."

But pride uttered one word in reply, in tones as hard as adamant:

"HONOR!"

He thought of his long line of ancestors, "without fear and without reproach." They seemed to point to him and say:

"In *your* time one married a forger—innocently: we do not blame her—but one hid his infamy that he might indulge a selfish passion! Out upon you for a sordid changeling!"

And before his mind's eye rose up the pale, accusing face of his proud sister.

"Coward!" it seemed to say, "dare you leave me in ignorance of my disgrace?"

Gazing at the picture, deprecatingly, he pleaded:

"My sister's honor! Can I betray her? Anything but that!"

And in his agony it seemed strange to him that she could look at him from the glass, with that sweet half-smile, all unmoved.

Then he bowed his face upon the lifeless effigy and wept.

All night long he struggled with his grief, and when he came forth in the morning he was as pale as death, yet sternly resolute.

"Mother, are you ready to start?"

"Immediately."

"We will go by the next boat."

Then the mother broke down.

"Oh, my son!"

And she threw her arms about him, sobbing hysterically.

"There! there! do not give way," he ad-

monished. "There is one who must look to you for an example of self-possession."

"Oh, the disgrace! the disgrace!" moaned the woman, somewhat selfishly.

"Think of your daughter's pain," suggested her son.

"Felix, you will not think of marrying her, after this?"

The young man set his teeth.

"Mother, do not torture me!" he said. "Do you not see what I am suffering?"

The beads of sweat standing on his forehead, the utter woe in his wan face, the terrible despair in his humid, bloodshot eyes, touched the woman that was in her. Laying her hand on his arm, she said, simply:

"Forgive me!"

He bent and kissed her forehead.

Two days later a sad party embarked on a northward bound boat. M. Bourdoine attended to everything. Mrs. Cornish was hysterical and melancholy. Felix was transformed from a happy-go-lucky good fellow to a stern, brooding man.

Long Jack, standing a little aloof on the levee, saw them, and rubbed his hands with malicious glee.

"Ah! my dear fellow!" he muttered. "You were going to have me horsewhipped, were you? Well, I'm happier than you are, I'll bet a pretty penny!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A COLD RECEPTION.

As the down-river boat touched the levee at Memphis on the fifteenth of December, a party of travelers, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Stanhope, Adele, and a nurse with the baby in her arms, stood in eager expectancy to disembark.

Descending the broad stairs to the lower deck, where the long gang-planks had been run out to the shore, they looked about for friends to meet them.

"Why, where is Felix?" asked Adele. "They must have expected us on this boat."

"There is the carriage, and here comes Cato," said Sibyl; and added anxiously: "He is alone. Surely nothing can be wrong?"

"Hyah! hyah! missy, I's powerful glad to see ye!" said the servant, crossing the gang-plank and greeting his former mistress with a grin which stretched from ear to ear. "De ole place hain't been right sence you been gone, nohow."

"Thank you, Cato," said Sibyl, who never let kindness, from however humble source, go unacknowledged. But where is my brother? Is there no one to receive us?"

Cato pursed up his lips and wrinkled his forehead.

"Dunno, missy," he said, in evident perplexity. "Pears like it's quare, too. But Massa Felix he say:

"'Cato, hitch up de hosses an' go to de levee. Massa Stanhope an' Missy Sibyl am coming home.'"

"But he needn't go fur to tell me dat! 'Fore de Lo'd! mammy's been jes' countin' de hours tell you come. She don't talk 'bout nuffin' else dis six weeks!"

"Yes. Well, you put the horses to the carriage?"

"Yes, missy, an' druv de keelage up to de front do' for Massa Felix. But he sent word dat he ain't goin' long. So hyer I be alone by myself."

"Why, that is strange."

"Pears like it was quare to dis chile," assented Cato, shaking his head.

"But what is the matter? Isn't Felix well?"

Cato removed his hat to scratch his head, with his eyes on the ground.

"Well," he said, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, "he's so's to be about. But Massa Felix ain't hisself, nohow."

"He isn't ill?"

"No, he ain't sick."

"Well, then, what ails him?"

"Well, he ain't chipper sence he come back from down de ribber. 'Pears like nuffin' don't suit him."

"But mother is well?"

"Well, she's got one o' her ole spells ag'in: but I reckon it ain't no worse'n usual."

Sibyl looked at her husband and sister-in-law. They could but look back at her.

There was an expression of such marked anxiety and chagrin in Adele's face that Sibyl looked at her again, and then whispered in her ear:

"You surely cannot have quarreled with him, dear?"

"I?" cried Adele. "Oh, no!"

"The quickest way to solve the problem is to

go on to the house," said Egbert, quietly. "You women must not let your fears run away with you. Doubtless the explanation is simple enough."

He had not the faintest idea that it could be in any way connected with himself.

They entered the carriage a rather depressed party, and spent an hour in fruitless speculation.

As they drove up before the house the main door was closed, and there was no one on the veranda to receive them.

But as they ascended the steps the door opened, and there stood M. Bourdoine, bowing with the Frenchiest of French deference.

But every other feeling gave way before his love for his pupil; and taking both her hands, he kissed first one and then the other, not in mere gallantry, but with genuine devotion. When he looked up there were tears in his eyes.

"Welcome home, my angelique—" he began; but Sibyl interrupted him, looking beyond him into the hall.

"But where are my mother and my brother?" she asked.

"All in good time! all in good time!" repeated the Frenchman, in evident embarrassment. "Have patience, yet a little. Ven you have made your toilet, Monsieur Felix and Madame Cornesh will see you in *ze* drawing-room."

"When we have made our toilets?—in the drawing-room?" cried Sibyl. "Why, what do you mean? What is the matter?"

Her eyes were wide with amazement and nameless dread.

"*Sa!*" sibilated the Frenchman, with almost a mother's solicitude. "Eet is my instruction."

"Do you mean to say that you are appointed to receive us, and that my mother and brother are in the house and do not come forward?"

"Zey have engagement, *ma cherie!*"

M. Bourdoine could scarcely restrain his

tears, and he held her hand in both of his. "What engagement can hold them at such a time as this? Oh! tell me the truth—my mother?"

"She is well."

"Truly! truly! Oh, do not deceive me!"

"I repeat she is well."

"And Felix?"

Adele, too, hung breathless on the answer.

"Monsieur Felix is well, too."

"Then what can be the matter? Where are they?"

"I cannot explain. Ven you have made your toilet—"

"Oh, this is cruel! I cannot wait. Where is my mother? I must go to her at once."

"Eet is her vish zat you first make your toilet. At two o'clock she vill see you, and all vill be explain in *ze* drawing-room."

Then Sibyl stood stock still.

Egbert drew her arm through his.

"Let us go to our room at once," he said.

"We cannot learn the reason for this until the appointed time."

His wife looked up at him.

His face was white and set.

"What is it, Egbert?" she asked.

"I do not know," was his reply. "Come, let us delay no longer."

She yielded mechanically.

Adele followed as if she were in a dream.

"What can keep him from me?" she asked her heart.

Her answer was a cold, dead void.

M. Bourdoine stopped the nurse with the baby as she passed.

"Ah! *ze* angel!" he murmured, taking it in his arms and kissing it.

There were tears on its cheek when he handed it back.

Sibyl had not noticed, but Egbert had, that M. Bourdoine had studiously avoided even so much as a glance of greeting to the Stanhopes, brother and sister.

For the next hour M. Bourdoine was, in outward appearance at least, the most wretched man in the world.

At two o'clock a servant was sent to announce to the guests that they were awaited in the drawing-room.

They went down together, Sibyl carrying her baby in her arms.

Some instinct led her to look upon it as an amulet against the mysterious impending evil.

At the door of the drawing-room both ladies caught their breath, and drew to either side of the brother and husband.

Long Jack was leaning carelessly against the mantle-piece. M. Bourdoine with difficulty kept his seat, with his eyes on the floor. Felix

stood, with gloomy frown, beside his mother's chair, the latter being in tears and clinging to his arm.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GLOVE TORN AWAY.

"MOTHER!—Felix!—what is the meaning of this strange reception? And why is that man here?"

The young wife hugged her child to her bosom, and shrunk close to her husband's side.

Mrs. Cornish arose and advanced with outstretched arms, crying:

"My child! my poor child!"

She clasped her wondering daughter in her arms, and sought to draw her away from her husband, as if there were contamination in proximity to him. Then, dropping her tear-wet face on that of the baby, she sobbed:

"Poor little angel! What—"

"Mother! mother!" cried the young wife, "what is it all about?"

"Pray be seated," said Felix, not raising his eyes from the floor.

His voice was evidently held in restraint.

Adele stood like a drooping lily. She was struggling to keep the tears out of her eyes long enough to see if he was really avoiding her.

"Felix!" she said, in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

The young man's lips twitched; his nostrils dilated; his breast rose and fell; every vestige of color faded out of his face; he grasped the back of his chair beside which he had been standing for support; he did not raise his eyes, however.

"I beg that you will be seated," he said, in a hard, set voice, speaking to no one in particular, "and then we will see whether this reception is not justified."

The party advanced into the room, but no one sat down.

"One year ago," began Felix, "Mr. Boardman made a charge in this room. Will you please to repeat it, sir?"

"Felix!" interposed Sibyl.

But her brother held up his hand.

"Pray do not interrupt us. Once I weakly yielded to sentiment. Now I am after facts, and I am determined to have them. Mr. Boardman, we attend you."

"Egbert, let us leave this place, instantly," cried Sibyl, turning to her husband. "My own brother—my own mother—have forgotten what is due to their own flesh and blood. Come! we have made a mistake—this is no home of mine."

"Sibyl! Sibyl! my wronged, insulted, outraged child, stop!" cried her mother, again throwing her arms about her. "Wait until you have heard the infamous treachery, the fraud, the disgrace! Oh, my child! my child!"

"Mother, you are beside yourself! I am ashamed to think that you could so far forget your pride as to listen to the foul slanders of a common gambler!"

Long Jack's eyes flashed, but a quiet smile curled his lips.

"Come, Egbert," pursued his wife; "and always remember that I have given not a moment's countenance to this insult."

"Are you a coward, as well as a villain?" demanded Felix, now glaring into Egbert's eyes. "Will you take advantage of a woman's infatuation to run away from this charge?"

"Mother, let me go. I have heard enough—more than enough," said Sibyl, in a choking voice, struggling to free herself.

But her husband's hand fell upon her shoulder.

"Be calm," he said to her, as if so perfect was his control over her that she yielded at once, but she trembled as if she could scarcely stand.

Adele saw her weakness, and though she could scarcely support her own weight, she whispered:

"Let me have the baby," and took him from his mother's arms.

Egbert faced his accusers. He was pale as a specter, yet he held his head erect, not like that of a criminal, and his eyes burned steadily.

"No, Mr. Cornish," he said, "I am neither a coward nor a villain!"

"Very good, sir. Then we but await the charge. Mr. Boardman."

And he bowed to the man addressed.

Long Jack fixed his eyes upon Egbert with cool insolence.

"I accuse CHARLES J. WELLS of forgery!"

Having thrown a venomous emphasis into the name, Long Jack paused, to let his words have their full effect.

A wave of crimson swept to Egbert's brow,

and as quickly fled, leaving him if possible paler than before.

"Charles J. Wells!" repeated Sibyl, wonderingly.

"Yes!" cried Felix, quivering with passion, "He has no right even to the name he bears! That is one of his many frauds."

"You are mistaken," said Egbert, steadily. "I have a perfect right to the name I gave your sister."

"Why did you flush to the roots of your hair at the mention of the name *Charles J. Wells*?"

"I might do that, and still have a right to the name of Egbert Stanhope."

"It is not the name you received from your father!"

"Are we not drifting from the main point? I think Mr. Boardman is not yet done."

"Very well, sir. But you shall not so easily evade the one thing which is vital."

"Mr. Boardman, pray proceed."

"In proof of which," pursued Long Jack, in the tones of a stern judge, "he bears in the palm of his right hand the letter F, branded by the executor of the law!"

There was a dead silence, which was broken by a plaintive wail from Mrs. Cornish:

"Oh, my child! my innocent, wronged child!"

Sibyl stood white and still, drawing a deep inhalation.

"What!" she cried, when she could find voice.

"Do you not understand?" said Felix, fiercely, "he is branded like a slave!"

"Infamous!" cried the proud wife, crimsoning to the temples.

Adele only panted in agony and terror.

Egbert's eyes had sought his wife's face. He saw that the ignominy of being branded had touched her pride as nothing else could have done.

In that moment of unutterable anguish his heart stopped beating, dark spots floated before his eyes, and there was the smell of blood in his nostrils.

Felix's hard voice called him back from the horrible, deadly faintness that was overpowering him.

"Now, sir, I call you to account! You, a branded felon, have married my sister under an alias! Come, sir, drop the mask! A year ago you deluded me into the belief that your remarkable custom of always going gloved was due to a birth-mark. Your effrontery will not save you a second time. I now demand that you remove your glove in the presence of all assembled, and expose the palm of your right hand."

"And, sir, I refuse!"

"You refuse?"

"I refuse."

Egbert folded his arms and looked at his accusers defiantly.

Long Jack smiled and stroked his mustache.

"*Morbleu!* you refuse?" echoed M. Bourdoine, now rising to his feet, pale with excitement.

Egbert paid no heed to him.

"Oh! oh! the disgrace will kill me!" sighed Mrs. Cornish.

"Then, sir, I shall proceed on the hypothesis that you dare not remove your glove," said Felix.

"It is your privilege to proceed on any hypothesis you choose," said Egbert, quietly.

"*Parbleu!* Monsieur, we shall rend ze glove from your hand! *Allons donc!* your infamy shall be brought to ze light of day! *Sang-dieu!* shall ze traitor—"

"Stop!" cried Sibyl, now finding her voice. All this time she had stood in dizzy amazement. "Stop! Egbert, remove your glove and confound this prince of slanderers."

"And do you require proof?" he asked, with a great reproach in his eyes.

"What! that my husband is not a felon? No! you know me better. See! I will turn my back. But this has gone so far that you must clear yourself from all suspicion."

Egbert turned to Adele, who had stood wide-eyed, and quivering with dread.

"What says my sister?" he asked.

A surge of tender emotion sent a transient color into the girl's cheeks, and made her eyes humid.

"I love you as you are, my brother," she said. "What is the opinion of the world to me? I know that you are all that is noble. Only—if you could—For the baby's sake, Egbert!"

His own mother could not have made the appeal more tenderly.

Egbert thanked the loyal heart with a look. Then he turned to see the effect of her words on Sibyl.

The young mother drew herself up proudly.

"My husband, the father of my boy, can be and must be above reproach!" she said, speaking at her brother and Long Jack defiantly.

For one moment there was a terrible struggle in Egbert Stanhope's breast. Then he spoke.

"Do not turn your back," he said to his wife. "Of all present, you have the best right to see."

"Sir, I am ready!"

He extended his gloved hand to Felix.

Flushing painfully, now that the crisis was at hand, and paling as suddenly again, Felix stepped forward.

Every one stood breathless.

A ferocious look of eager expectancy came into Long Jack's eyes, and he bent forward to get a first glimpse of the palm.

With a horrible, creeping sickness coming over him, Egbert turned away his head and covered his face with his left hand.

Felix seized the glove in the opening below the button, and with a quick wrench, tore out the palm, stripping down the fingers, so that the glove hung in tatters, and the hand was all exposed, except the thumb!

CHAPTER XXV.

BRANDED IN THE PALM.

EVERY one started forward to gaze upon the palm thus rudely divested of its covering.

"*Sacr-r-re!*" ejaculated M. Bourdoine.

A round oath issued from Felix's lips.

"Oh, Egbert!" cried Adele.

"Oh! the disgrace! the disgrace!" moaned Mrs. Cornish.

Quivering from head to foot, Egbert could not wholly repress a groan.

Only Long Jack and Sibyl remained mute.

The gambler sunk back to his graceful attitude against the mantle-piece. His face, blanched by the anxiety of the critical moment, now resumed its wonted complexion, a little flushed, if anything. His eyes were merciless in their cold exultation. Egbert and Sibyl, Felix and Adele—all had scorned him. Now he saw their hearts wrung with anguish.

There was but one bitter drop in his cup. He could not but reflect.

"All the revenge in the world will not win me one glance, one touch of love from her!"

As for Sibyl, she stood like a statue of agonized amazement.

For perhaps thirty seconds her eyes remained riveted on the livid scar, in the form of a letter F. Then she half-turned away, groped blindly with her hands, and with a murmuring, inarticulate sound issuing from her lips, fell prone on the floor.

Felix, Long Jack and M. Bourdoine sprung forward to catch her, but too late.

Mrs. Cornish cast herself down beside the body of her unconscious daughter, crying:

"Oh! my poor, murdered child! She is dead! she is dead!"

Wild with excitement, Adele thrust the baby into M. Bourdoine's arms, that gentleman receiving it as gingerly as if it were some frail device of glass. Then she turned to assist her swooned sister-in-law—the woman whom Egbert loved.

But Felix brushed almost rudely before her, lifted his sister and placed her on the sofa.

Cut to the heart, Adele shrunk back.

From her brother she heard a low-murmured: "My God!"

He had sunk into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

From following Felix with unutterable reproach Adele's eyes turned to Egbert. In an instant she had glided to his side and wound her arms about him.

"Dear brother! I am left to you. I love you just the same," she whispered in his ear.

He raised his face ghastly with anguish, and clutched her hands as a drowning man might seize upon a bit of timber.

"You do not despise me, like all the rest?" he cried, almost fiercely.

"No! no! my brother. I love you, as our mother did!"

With a great, tremulous cry he pressed her hands to his face, kissing them and raining tears upon them.

"Come!" he said, rising suddenly and drawing her toward the door, "let us go!"

"Go?" she echoed. "Where? You cannot leave her—your wife!"

"She has no further need of me! Have I not cursed her sufficiently?"

"Yes, you wretch!" cried Mrs. Cornish, venomously. "Leave this house and the country, if you have a spark of manhood in you!"

"Madam, you need have no fears; I will act upon your suggestion."

"Not until I have had the pleasure of meeting

you. Where can my friends find you?" demanded Felix.

"At the Metropolitan."

"Thank you. We will not detain you long."

"And if?" cried M. Bourdoine. "You will not deny me the privilege of vindicating the honor of my pupil, after Monsieur Corneesh, if the perverse fate shall favor the side of perfidy?"

"No. The more the merrier," replied Egbert, and exchanged cards with the delighted Frenchman.

Adele had not noticed the significance of this. She had been crying:

"But, Egbert, the baby!"

He paid no heed, but drew her almost forcibly from the room.

"The carriage will await you," were Felix's parting words, as he jerked the bell-rope.

"I shall be forced to accept this last courtesy," said Egbert, as he bowed at the door.

At the door of her room Adele clung to her brother convulsively.

"Oh, Egbert! you are not going to give them up?"

"Have I any choice?" he asked, with a bitter laugh.

"But the baby is yours; and she is your wife—she cannot desert you."

"The law will readily grant her a divorce."

"But her love for you?"

"You alone have stood the test."

"But surely she does love you. Every hour of the past year has attested that. Give her time, Egbert. She was overcome."

"She turned away! Had she not said that her husband must be above reproach?"

"Come! let us waste no more time!" he said, knitting his brows with pain.

And he almost pushed her inside her room door.

Left alone, for in the general absorption the sending of a servant to attend her had been overlooked, Adele began to don her outer garments like one in a dream. She could scarcely realize that Felix had not exchanged a word with her—had scarcely glanced at her. It all seemed like some terrible nightmare.

Meanwhile, Egbert passed on to the suit of rooms assigned to him and his wife. Turn where he might, some reminder of her and of his child was presented to his eye.

Lying on the dressing-table were a dainty lace handkerchief and a tiny worsted shoe which the mother's loving fingers had knit.

The wretched husband and father gathered them up together, and gazed at them with a hard, dry-eyed despair.

"My lost darlings!" he murmured, with a choking sensation in his throat.

He pressed the mementoes to his lips, and then placed them in an inner breast-pocket of his vest, just over his heart.

When he knocked at Adele's door he found her waiting for him, a veritable little ghost of wretchedness.

"I have brought only misery upon all that I love," he said, gathering her in his arms.

"No, my brother. You have made all my life happy," she said, clinging to him.

"To crown it with a life of despair!"

"Not! not! do not blame yourself, dear."

He bent and kissed her.

And without further words they passed down the deserted halls, detecting here and there a servant who peeped curiously from some half-opened door, or around some angle.

In neglect and dishonor they passed from the house, entered the carriage, and were driven away.

Arriving at the hotel, Egbert parted with his sister at her room door.

"I shall be busy this afternoon and evening," he said. "Be in readiness to return home to-morrow at noon."

"One moment! one moment!" she pleaded, and clung to him sobbing.

"My poor darling! I could not help you to bear your sorrow, if I were to stay with you," he said, gently.

"It is not that. But— Oh, Egbert! cannot something be done?"

"Nothing!" he said, with a spasm of pain, and put her gently away.

Then the girl cast herself upon her bed and gave free vent to her sore heart. Through the long hours she grieved, going over and over again her lover's every look and word.

When at last she fell into an exhausted sleep, it was disturbed by the most hideous dreams.

At the first faint gleam of morning she summoned an attendant. She could not endure to remain longer alone. Her pulses throbbed with fever, and she was haunted by fancies she could not subdue.

"Get me into a dressing-gown and summon

Mr. Stanhope," she said. "I am afraid I am going to be sick."

She could scarcely stand erect, and clung to the servant for support.

"Massa Stanhope?" repeated the girl. "De gemman in number forty-nine?"

"Yes. He is my brother."

The servant looked confused and frightened.

"I reckon he's gone out," she said, hesitating.

"Gone out? So early? Where, I wonder?"

"Put on de dressin'-gown, missy. Dere, now set down."

"But where can my brother have gone, at this time in the morning? Did he leave no word—a note?"

"No, missy."

"That's strange."

The girl fidgeted uneasily.

"What is the matter?" asked Adele, noticing her agitation.

"I dunno as I ought to tell ye, missy," said the girl, reluctantly.

"Tell me what?" demanded Adele, becoming fearful. "Speak at once. Has anything happened to my brother?"

"Well, dar was some gemmen to see him las' night. And dis mornin', not half an hour ago, he went out in a keelage wid Col. Jackson an' another gemman."

"Yes—well?"

"Dey had a box along. An' I heered Pomp say— 'Pomp's a cousin o' mine.'"

"Well, go on. What did he say?"

"He reckoned dat dar was somefin' in de wind. Gemmen don't go away dat way fur nuffin'."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, yo see, Pomp he allowed ef Massa Stanhope wasn't goin' to fight a duel, it was powerful queer."

With a scream Adele leaped to her feet.

"Help me to dress instantly," she commanded. "But, first, order a carriage, and summon the proprietor of the hotel."

"I hope, missy, I hain't done nuffin' wrong in tellin' ye."

"Don't waste time in idle talk. Go at once, and do as I bid you!"

Twenty minutes later a carriage containing Adele and the proprietor of the hotel was dashing madly through the streets of Memphis.

"To the dueling-ground!" had been the driver's direction. "And one hundred dollars, if you are in time!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CHALLENGE.

SIBYL STANHOPE had sustained a terrible shock. The man whom she had esteemed a demigod suddenly stood revealed a felon—as Felix had said, "branded like a slave!" He whom her fond fancy had invested with attributes far above the common run of men had been deceiving her from the very first. He had taken advantage of her generous trust in him to betray her thus flagrantly.

For hours she was roused from a deathlike swoon, only to give way to an agony of despair, until unconsciousness again came to her relief.

A doctor had been summoned, and it was near midnight before she succumbed to the opiates they gave her and sunk into a heavy, unnatural sleep, broken by mutterings and moans.

Meanwhile, having given his stricken sister into the keeping of his mother and her woman attendants, Felix had again sought Long Jack and M. Bourdoine in the drawing-room.

Addressing the gambler, he said:

"The unexpected turn of events has prevented me from carrying out my original purpose of offering an apology to you before all the witnesses of my unwarranted treatment of you a year ago. But before M. Bourdoine I do now apologize."

He bowed with a humility that was belied by his scornful eyes and the evidences of passion with difficulty repressed.

"It is altogether needless," said Jack, bowing in turn. "All things considered, I feel that I have nothing to complain of."

"No doubt you look upon your work with satisfaction. Well, sir, you certainly have accomplished your object. As for me, I now owe you nothing. There is nothing left, then, but for you to take your unwelcome person from my house, never to darken its doors again."

Long Jack shrugged his shoulders, smiled sarcastically, bowed and said:

"Allow me to bid you good-by!"

When he was gone Felix turned to the Frenchman.

"M. Bourdoine, I promised Mr. Wells, or Stanhope, or whatever his name may be, that I

would not keep him waiting. If you will accompany me, we will go into the city, secure our seconds, and have the preliminaries over before dinner-time."

"M. Corneesh, I attend your pleasure."

The carriage, having returned, was entered by the gentlemen and driven back to the city.

Reaching the business part of the city, they had not driven far before they met a couple of young gentlemen strolling leisurely arm in arm.

"The very men!" exclaimed Felix, and then called to his coachman:

"Stop the carriage."

The horses were reined in, and, opening the carriage door, Felix called:

"Canfield! Hovey! Good-afternoon!"

"Ah! Cornish, how do you do?"

"Are you busy?"

"Not at all."

"Get in here, if you please."

The gentlemen complied, and Felix presented them:

"Gentlemen, my friend, M. Gaspard Bourdoine. Monsieur, Mr. Charles Canfield—Capt. Edward Hovey."

While the gentlemen were shaking hands, Felix called to his coachman:

"To the Merchants' Hotel."

"And what turn of the wheel of Fortune has brought us the pleasure of your company to-day, Cornish?" asked Mr. Canfield, familiarly.

"A little affair of pistols for two," said Felix, quietly.

"No!" exclaimed Capt. Hovey, with a brightening of the face, as if the prospect was an unexpected treat.

"Well, old fellow," said Canfield, "you might have gone further and found less cordial backers than Ned and I."

"I thought that I might count on your support."

"To the last round, and against the world!" cried Canfield, enthusiastically.

"But who is the next lucky man?" asked Capt. Hovey.

"A gentleman doubtless known to you as Egbert Stanhope."

Neither noticed any peculiarity in the phraseology Felix chose to employ, not knowing that there was any question as to Egbert's right to the name by which he was known; but Capt. Hovey cried:

"What! Elegant Egbert?"

While Canfield opened his eyes in astonishment, exclaiming:

"The deuce! Why I thought he married—"

Stopped short, changed color, and stammered:

"Ah—I beg your pardon! Ned and I have been away for two years, you know."

A scarlet flush mounted to Felix's brow. Gravely he said:

"That is the reason I selected you, gentlemen. In this matter I wish to meet no questions and as few strange looks as possible."

"One word, to set us right as to our duty," said Capt. Hovey. "There is no room for apology?"

"None would be received, and none will be offered. You have but to arrange for the meeting, and see that it is properly conducted."

"If ze gentlemen would note t'ink eet too onerous a duty to serve me in ze like capacity, if I have ze opportunity to fight after my gude friend, M. Corneesh, zeir great kindness and condescension would be ever treasured in grateful remembrance. Ze gentleman have honored me vis ze privelege to meet him, if he shall survive ze first encounter, and as stranger I have no friend to whom I might apply for soche service."

"It will afford us pleasure, sir, to serve you," said Canfield.

Hovey bowed his acquiescence.

Both gentlemen looked a little curious at this double meeting. How could this dapper little Frenchman be concerned in the quarrel between the brothers-in-law?—and what was the deadly feud that was to remain a mystery?

But quarrels could arise almost any way, and involve almost any one. Honor was a very touchy thing. And every man had a right to shut off gossip by declining to take the world into his confidence in these little matters.

"When would it suit you to have the affair come off?" asked Hovey.

"As soon as possible. To-morrow morning at sunrise, if agreeable."

"At the usual rendezvous, I suppose?" asked Canfield.

"Yes."

"And we an find Mr. Stanhope?"

"At the Metropolitan."

Having now reached the Merchants' Hotel.

Felix ordered a private parlor, wine and writing materials.

The challenges were written and intrusted to the seconds.

"My carriage is at your service. We will await you here," were Felix's parting words; and the gentlemen withdrew on their errand.

They were courteously received by Egbert.

Mr. Canfield introduced his colleague, who knew Egbert only by reputation, and presenting the challenges, said:

"We are commissioned to wait upon you with these documents. Doubtless you can refer us to friends who will act for you."

Egbert glanced over the challenges, as a matter of form, and replied:

"I take pleasure in referring you to Col. Jackson and Dr. Wingate. I think you are already acquainted with them."

"Yes; and I could not wish to meet pleasant gentlemen."

"They are awaiting you in room twenty-three."

The gentlemen then bowed themselves out, sent their cards to room twenty-three, and in two minutes were seated round a table, taking wine with Messrs Jackson and Wingate.

"Well, gentlemen," said the colonel, crossing his legs on the corner of the table, and settling himself comfortably for a cigar, "I suppose there is very little to be settled in the way of preliminaries?"

"In this degenerate age there is no such thing as a choice of weapons," observed Capt. Hovey.

"I don't see what could be prettier than a pistol," said Dr. Wingate. "By the way, the colonel has the neatest thing in that line I ever saw."

"Can you reach them there on the mantle-piece, Mr. Canfield?" asked Colonel Jackson, too lazy to change his position. "Ah! thank you. What do you think of them, gentlemen?"

He opened the rosewood case and displayed a beautiful set of dueling pistols, lying in beds of satin, like jewelry.

"By Jove! they are beauties, and no mistake!" cried Captain Hovey, viewing them with the eye of a connoisseur.

When they had admired them all round, their happy possessor rubbed them off with chamois leather, stroking them affectionately, and put them back in their places.

"And are we to settle our little affair with such beauties?" asked Mr. Canfield.

"I shall be glad to have them christened by gentlemen both of whom I esteem so highly," replied the colonel.

"What can you do for us in the way of time?"

"We take it for granted that you want the thing over with."

"Yes. The sooner the better."

"How will to-morrow morning suit?"

"To a T."

"You can be on the ground when the sun kisses the hill-tops?"

"Trust us to be punctual."

"There's no choice of place."

"Up the river, of course."

"And are you responsible for such surgical attendance as we may need, doctor?"

"If agreeable to you."

"Perfectly."

"Then I presume there is nothing further at present," observed Captain Hovey.

"No more business," said Canfield; "but, colonel, this is a rather odd affair, is it not?"

"I'm hardly in a position to judge," said Jackson, with a slight smile.

"What! does nobody know anything about it?"

"I don't. And I know of no one who does."

"It's not a public quarrel, then?"

"I presume not."

"Well, every one to his taste. I suppose they have their reasons. Let us drink to a happy issue of the affair."

The glasses were filled and emptied, and Messrs. Canfield and Hovey took their leave.

The next morning before daybreak two carriages were rolling rapidly along a road following the course of the river, to a rendezvous much resorted to by gentlemen of Memphis who sought satisfaction at twelve paces.

CHAPTER XXVII

A STRANGE DUEL.

BOTH Egbert and Felix had spent a sleepless night.

The former seemed to have settled down into a stony despair. It was as if he had given up the struggle, and was now wholly apathetic as to the future.

"Wife and child both gone!" he muttered, again and again. "To her to whom I should be

a protector I am but a stumbling-block. I have brought upon her a wretchedness for which nothing can compensate. Why should I wish to live? My God! I have lived long enough to bring a life-misery to the three whom I loved most! And for what? Why was I singled out among men to be a curse to myself and to all with whom I come in contact?"

Felix too paced his room a prey to anguish that knew no respite.

"I love her so!" he moaned. "And the bullet that kills her brother will pierce her heart! Oh, Adele! I am putting all the eternities between us!"

Before others he had been as immovable as adamant. Now that he was alone his heart revenged itself on his iron will and pride.

"By Jove! Cornish, you look like a ghost!" was the comment of Captain Hovey, when they were about to set out in the morning. "This will never do, man. We'll have to brace you up with wine."

"I need no artificial prop to my nerves," said Felix, bitterly. "I have that within which will steady my hand."

They entered the carriage and drove rapidly out of the town into the country, where Nature was just waking from her repose.

There was a balmy freshness in the air, which was vocal with silvan minstrelsy. Every blade of grass had its dew-gem. In the east the purple vault of heaven was just beginning to glow with the first streaks of dawn.

From the beaten road-track the vehicle rolled upon the velvet carpet of greensward, and came to a halt in an open glade, from which long stretches of the broad Mississippi were visible to the north-west and south-east.

"First on the ground!" exclaimed Mr. Canfield.

But the words were scarcely out of his mouth when the sound of a rapidly-approaching carriage reached his ears.

"I hope we have not kept you waiting, gentlemen?" was Colonel Jackson's salutation.

"We were not sixty seconds ahead of you."

"Is this the spot?"

"It is the best in this vicinity. You see that the ground is perfectly level, and standing north-west and south-east you have the sky for a back ground for both parties."

"That is true. There is little choice of position; but for form's sake we will toss up."

The principals were standing apart in solitude, M. Bourdoine being a sort of odd third. He seemed in excellent spirits, and had gathered and pinned to the left lapel of his coat a stray flower which the warm sun had brought out in a sheltered nook looking southward.

The seconds were busy loading the weapons and arranging the case of surgical instruments. There was nothing in their easy manner to indicate the serious business in which they were engaged.

"By the way, gentlemen," said Colonel Jackson, "my principal desires a word in private with yours before the affair begins."

"That's a little unusual, but I see no objection to it. Ned, apprise Mr. Cornish, and see what he says."

Felix was willing to receive any communication; and, being notified, Egbert slowly advanced to within two or three paces of where he stood.

"I desire to say," he said, in a low tone, "that I spent a part of last night in writing a letter. When I am dead I wish you to place no obstacles in the way of your sister receiving it. She will show it to you, or read to you such portions as she thinks fit. Have I your promise?"

"It is not at all certain which, if either, of us will leave this place," said Felix. "If you do not, I promise you that my resentment shall not reach beyond the grave."

"Thank you. That is sufficient."

Egbert withdrew again; and in due time the space was paced off, and the duelists placed in position.

They stood with the pistol arm hanging at the side.

"You will have warning; I will then count: One!—Two!—Fire!" said Col. Jackson.

The seconds then withdrew, Col. Jackson standing midway between the contestants, and far enough out of the line of fire to form almost an equilateral triangle.

"Gentlemen, are you ready?" he asked.

There was an interval in which Felix thought of Adele's agonized face, and Egbert recalled the look of horror in his wife's eyes as she gazed upon his branded palm.

Then the monotonous voice again broke the stillness:

"One!—Two!—FIRE!"

Felix's arm rose to a level with the shoulder. Egbert stood as motionless as a statue.

There was a moment of deathlike suspense. Then Felix let his weapon fall again to his side.

"I cannot shoot at a man who does not shoot at me," he said, turning paler.

"While you have every reason to wish to kill me, does not every consideration deter me from shooting at you?" asked Egbert, sadly, rather than angrily. "Go on! I have no desire to escape your vengeance."

"Do you take me for a murderer?"

"No. My life is forfeit to you. You but exact your right."

"I do not understand your subtle distinctions," said Felix, with increasing heat; "unless this be a device to escape the amenability of a gentleman without incurring the odium of a coward!"

Egbert smiled sardonically.

"Do you think me so much in love with life?" he asked. "A moment's reflection will show you that it can have few charms for me."

"I do not know," replied Felix. "There are men who cling to life, no matter how infamous. But, sir, if you refuse to fight with me, I will cowhide you in the streets of Memphis!"

A purple flush mounted to Egbert's temples.

"Col. Jackson," he said, "may I trouble you to give the signal again? I am ready."

All this time the seconds had stood in speechless astonishment. They now recovered themselves.

"One moment," interposed Dr. Wingate. "I object to my principal firing immediately upon the excitement of this unusual proceeding."

"Have no concern for me, gentlemen," said Felix. "I prefer that there be no further delay."

"Is it not an even thing?" whispered Mr. Canfield, pulling Dr. Wingate's sleeve. "I'm of opinion it's quite as exciting to be threatened with a cowhiding as to threaten."

Wingate yielded; and seeing no further opposition, Col. Jackson again called:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

A slight pause, and then for a second time:

"One!—Two!—FIRE!"

The arms of both gentlemen went up—there was a double discharge, blended with a piercing scream—Egbert dropped his weapon and pressed his hand to his breast, staggered a step or two, and fell upon his face.

Felix lowered his weapon and remained standing untouched. From a branch over his head a dead leaf came fluttering down, having been cut from its stem by Egbert's bullet.

"By Heaven! he never fired at him at all!" cried Col. Jackson.

But his comrades did not hear him.

A third carriage dashed into the open space. A woman, whose first shriek had blended with the pistol-shots, leaped out, screaming:

"Bertiel! Oh, Bertiel!"

She staggered just far enough to fall unconscious beside her brother.

"My God!" cried Felix, dropping his weapon.

Covering his face with his hands, he turned and staggered into the arms of Capt. Hovey, who had approached to relieve him of his pistol.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"WHO WOULD BELIEVE ME?"

"Ah! Ma'am'selle Adele!" cried M. Bourdoine, "vat shall bring her at ze time inopportune? Messieurs, make way to ze carriage."

He bent over her, and would have lifted her from the ground, but a hand nerved like iron grasped him by the shoulder and drew him back.

After the first deadly faintness and horror, Felix had broken away from Captain Hovey. No one but he must touch Adele. He had turned from her and tried to tear her from his heart, but he still had rights before the hands of strangers.

Lifting her limp form in his arms, he bore her to the carriage, now empty, Mr. Scoville, the proprietor of the Metropolitan, having joined the gentlemen gathered about Egbert.

"Go to yonder carriage and get a flask of brandy, which you will find near the case of surgical instruments," he said to the driver.

While the man was gone, Felix entered the carriage and placed his burden in a reclining posture on the back seat, still supporting her head on his arm.

"Oh, my poor darling! will you ever forgive me?" he murmured, gazing into her wan face.

He kissed the pale lips again and again. It might be his last opportunity.

"And have I killed your brother?" he sighed.

"Ah! what fiend could have possessed me to fight with him? Why was not my arm paralyzed?"

ed before it directed the accursed weapon! Oh, but it was my sister, Adele! He had wronged her beyond words! Think of her life blasted."

"Here is the liquor, sir."

Felix started. He had forgotten everything save the girl he held in his arms.

Receiving the flask from the man, he poured a few drops between the lips of the unconscious girl; then bathed her temples with it, and chafed her hands.

The girl moved uneasily, moaned, opened her eyes, gazed about wonderingly, recognized the face bending over her, started up, and shrunk shuddering away.

"Adele! my darling!" he pleaded, trying to take her hands.

"No! no! no! no!" cried the girl, wildly, shrinking back with horror. "Do not dare to touch me ever again! Your hands are stained with his blood! Murderer! Do you hear?—murderer!"

With a groan Felix sunk back on the forward seat, hiding his face with his hands from her accusing eyes.

With a cry she leaped by him out of the carriage, and ran to where Egbert lay under the surgeon's hands.

Recognizing only M. Bourdoine, she clutched his arm and covered close to his side, whispering, in a hoarse voice, while she gazed between the bodies of the other gentlemen at the motionless form stretched on the ground:

"Oh! is he dead? Oh! he killed him! Oh! I saw him fall—I saw him fall!"

"No, madam, he is not dead," replied the surgeon, looking up. "M. Bourdoine, if you are a friend of the lady, will you take her to her carriage?"

"Oh no! not there! He is there! Let me stay with my brother."

"You must be very quiet, then, and not disturb him when he recovers."

"I will be quiet."

"Jackson, can you improvise a litter with the tongues of the carriages? There is a house not far from here to which we can carry him. It would be dangerous to attempt to move him to the city, now; but with proper care this wound need not prove fatal, though it is certainly critical. The ball has passed above the heart. I shall probe for it as soon as we get him to bed."

The latter part of the doctor's speech was addressed to the other gentlemen. Colonel Jackson had immediately gone off to make the litter, as soon as he learned what was required of him.

The tongues of two of the carriages were removed and laid side by side. The whistle-trees were then bound across them about seven feet apart, and over this structure was stretched a horse-blanket, making a very comfortable litter.

It was not the first time Colonel Jackson had had the supervision of a like device.

The wounded man was carefully placed upon the litter, and four men bore him to a small cottage farm-house, perhaps a quarter of a mile up the river.

The farmer's wife gave up two of her best rooms, and Adele entered upon her duties as nurse, which were destined to hold her for several weeks.

The duel was over. Felix went home and shut himself up in his library. He resolved to arrange his business so that he could go abroad for two or three years. In a week's time everything could be arranged.

The only drawback was Sibyl. She seemed threatened with a severe attack of illness. As yet she knew nothing about the duel.

Meanwhile, the bullet had been removed from Egbert's body. He had passed two days mostly under the influence of opiates. On the third his brain cleared and he called Adele to him.

"My sister, what is the doctor's verdict on my case?"

"He says that with proper nursing you will get well. And I will nurse you, Bertie! Oh, my care shall not be remitted a moment!"

Egbert shook his head.

"The doctor is mistaken," he said. "A man with proper hope and the desire to live might rally; but not I."

"Oh! do not speak so, Bertie. You do desire to live—for my sake."

"I love you, dear. I am sorry for the pain my death will cause you. But, after what has passed, you cannot expect me to cling to life. No, Adele, it will be better for all concerned that I should be removed out of the way."

"Oh, Bertie!"

"I had all that man could crave. I have lost all! To me, now, life would be a protracted hell.

Before, I had nothing to look back upon. Now the contrast would drive me to suicide!"

"My brother, you are ill now. When you are well—"

"Would the return to health bring back her love and respect?"

"Bertie, she is your wife. Can the year of happiness pass for nothing? She must forgive you, dear."

A spasm of pain shot athwart his face.

"It is of this I wish to speak to you now. Have you forgiven me? Can you love a brother branded for forgery?"

She buried her face in the bedclothes to stifle the cry of pain that rose to her lips.

"I have nothing to forgive," she said, when she could command her voice. "Nothing in the world could change my love for you. Bertie, can I ever forget! You did not shoot—at—him!"

A faint smile came to Egbert's lips.

"It was a slight return for all the misery I have brought you. Besides, could I shoot her brother?"

"Will not that plead for you, dear?"

"Adele, if Sibyl were to forgive a felon, could she ever respect him?"

"But a life of right living?"

"Could never blot out the recollection that her husband was branded by the law?"

Adele was silenced.

"Adele," said the sick man, presently, "in my portfolio you will find a large envelope addressed: 'To my wife.' Get it and bring it here."

The girl complied.

"I wrote this on the night of the fifteenth," he went on, "and just before our meeting Felix promised that he would not oppose its delivery after my death. I want you to read it now, and when I am dead take it to her."

With trembling fingers Adele drew forth the inclosures. They consisted of a letter in Egbert's handwriting and a document showing that his name had been changed from Charles J. Wells to Egbert Stanhope by act of the legislature of Maine.

Having gathered the import of this last document, Adele kissed her brother with grateful tears in her eyes. Here was one point, at least, cleared up.

Then she set to work to read the letter eagerly. But she had read scarcely a page when she cried:

"Oh, Bertie! you are innocent! I knew it! I knew it! Oh, I should never have entertained a moment of doubt, if you had not seemed to confess it yourself! And even then I could not bring myself to see how it could be possible. Oh, my darling!"

And casting herself on her knees at the bedside, she fell to sobbing and kissing his hand.

"But why did you not tell us?" she asked. "All this suffering might have been prevented."

He shook his head.

"Who would have believed me in the face of the brand of the law. No, there is no use. When I am dead perhaps she will try to make herself believe my innocence; and it may be some comfort to her."

"But our mother believed you, dear; and my father believed you; and I believe you!"

"It would have been hard, indeed, if my own mother had refused to believe me. As for your father, I think his love for our mother must have induced him to make large concessions, even at variance with his judgment. I can never be sufficiently grateful to him for his kindness. My own father could not have done more."

"But I, Bertie! There is nothing to induce me to believe you but my knowledge of your uprightness of character. And I believe you implicitly."

"But you are my 'little sister Adele.' And don't you see you have taken my bare word, without having weighed the evidence?"

"But she is your wife! Is she not as near to you as I? And has she not known you intimately for over a year?"

Again he shook his head.

"Every one has not your trusting nature," he said. "Even when you believed me guilty, you did not turn from me."

"No, no, I never really believed you guilty, Bertie. I always knew that somehow it couldn't be, in spite of everything."

"That is the difference of nature, love. You have no pride—only your gentle, clinging heart."

At this moment the doctor entered.

"What! talking?" he said, stepping quickly forward to feel his patient's pulse. "This will

never do. You have worked yourself into a fever."

"It matters little, doctor. It was business that must be attended to before I had lost the power."

"Business be—neglected?" said the doctor, checking himself in time. "I'm afraid I shall have to get you a more discreet nurse."

"No, I'll not offend again," said Adele, her eyes sparkling like diamonds.

"Doctor, how long will he sleep?" she asked, later, when the physician was about to take his departure.

"Three or four hours—perhaps five."

Ten minutes later Adele was in a carriage, driving like the wind toward Riverside!

CHAPTER XXIX.

PRIDE AND LOVE.

WITH palpitating heart Adele found herself once more in the carriage leading up to the mansion house of Riverside. When she alighted and ascended the steps of the veranda, her limbs trembled under her so that she could scarcely support herself.

The maid who answered the bell hardly repressed a scream.

"Fore de Lo'd! Missy Adele!"

"Is Mrs. Stanhope in her room?" asked Adele, hurriedly.

"Yes, missy."

"Say nothing to any one about my being here. I can find my way alone."

She slipped a piece of money into the girl's hand, and ran up the staircase and along the corridor until she reached Sibyl's door.

"Come!" said a faint voice, in answer to her knock.

She opened the door, glided in, and closed it behind her.

A creature pitifully wan and woebegone reclined in an invalid-chair, looking the wreck of our blooming Sibyl. Her eyes were red with constant weeping, and her face was drawn with pain.

On the bed, within reach of her hand, lay her infant, peacefully sleeping.

At sight of Adele the stricken wife started up with a faint cry, but immediately sunk back, almost fainting.

Adele glided up to her, cast herself on her knees on an ottoman at her feet, and clasped the quivering, panting form in her arms.

"Oh! my poor darling!" she cooed.

And the other could only put her weak arms about the neck of her sister, and clasp her close, while she sobbed.

Presently she whispered:

"How is he?"

All her heart was in her words, and she trembled like an aspen while waiting for the answer.

Adele drew her head back, so that she could look into the face of her sister-in-law.

"Do you love him?" she asked.

The wan cheeks of the young wife flushed, tears sprang to her eyes, and her bosom dilated with a tremulous half-sob, half-sigh.

"Can you ask me such a question?"

"Is your love strong enough to overlook everything? Can you forgive him?"

The color deepened in Sibyl's face, her eyes drove the tears back to their source, her nostrils quivered, and her voice became firm.

"No!" she said, withdrawing her arms from Adele's neck. "He deceived me."

"He is your husband."

"He is a felon!"—with a shudder.

"The father of your child."

"He is branded with infamy! May God forgive him for leaving such a heritage to my child—I cannot!"

She reached out her hand and clenched her fingers in the dainty lace wraps of the sleeping child. For days and weeks and months she had wrought, jealous that any hand but hers should fashion those delicate fabrics; and with every stitch was interwoven a dream for the future. Alas! how all had been blasted! And now she gazed at him as if somehow she had wronged him by giving him birth.

Adele gazed at her in wonder and pain. Her gentle nature could not conceive how pride could conquer love. She could forgive Felix anything!

But then there arose before her imagination the picture of her brother falling and fainting with the bullet of his adversary lodged in his breast. And she shuddered. At any rate, she could forgive him any injury to herself.

"But I love him! Oh, I do love him!" cried Sibyl, turning again. "And you have come to tell me something—I know you have. Did he—did he send you—to—"

"No!" said Adele, shortly. "He has no idea that I am here."

She resented the hardness that could stand out against Egbert.

All the hope died out of the wife's eyes. With a sob she sunk back and covered her face with her hands.

"You have not told me a word about him yet," she said, with the petulance of keen pain.

"How has he borne it?"

"He is dying for the loss of his wife and child!" said Adele, abruptly.

She was not loth to make this proud wife suffer some.

Sibyl started and withdrew her hands from her face. But she recovered herself, and said:

"Men do not die of heartache."

"Have they not told you?" asked Adele.

"Of what?"

"Of the duel."

"A duel?"

"Certainly."

"When?"

"Day before yesterday."

"And with whom?"

Sibyl sat erect now, and was clinging to Adele and hanging upon her words with piteous

terms.

"With Felix."

"Oh, Heaven!"

The distracted wife cast aside the shawls in which she was wrapped, and rose to her feet.

"And he is wounded!—dying! Take me to him at once! Oh, Egbert! my husband! my darling husband! that I should have turned from you! Oh, if he should die before I can get to him and tell him how I do love him, and ask his forgiveness! Shall we be in time? Help me, Adele!"

She tottered across the room to where a dress was lying over the back of a chair.

Now Adele's face glowed with happiness. A rippling murmur of delight and love issued from her lips. With a light step she followed her sister-in-law and clasped her in her arms.

"Wait, dear," she said. "There is no hurry. You cannot see him for two or three hours. He is sleeping. I have much to show you and say to you before you go. Sit down again, my love."

Tenderly she conducted her back, and Sibyl sunk almost exhausted in the chair.

"Take this wine," urged Adele, holding the glass to her lips.

Sibyl drank, and said:

"Oh, that my brother should seek his life!"

"Hush, dear! don't think of that," said Adele, her face blanching with pain at the recollection.

Then she told Sibyl all about the duel, and about Egbert's condition—how he was dying because he had no hope, and no wish to live. And the young wife listened with tears and murmurings of self-reproach.

"And now, dear," concluded Adele, "when he expected to go out to death he wrote an account of his past life for you. It was not to be given to you until he was dead; and even now he does not know that you will see it. But I have come to you on my own responsibility."

"Sibyl, can you believe that he might be tried, convicted and branded as a felon and yet be innocent?"

"Innocent!" repeated the wife.

"Yes. Think of the unspeakable wrong, if a man with a high sense of honor should have his life blasted at the very outset by such a charge as forgery—if he should be branded in the palm for a crime of which he was no more guilty than you or I! And then suppose that his own wife should side with the cruel, unjust world, and cast him off!"

Tears were streaming from the speaker's eyes, and her voice was broken by sobs.

"Adele, is he innocent?—does he say so?" asked Sibyl, clinging to her in new distress and fear.

"Yes, Sibyl. All his life has been a great wrong. Oh, dear, you must believe him! It is the same as his dying testament; because it is the last he expected to say to you in life. Here it is. Read it, dear, and, oh! double-wisely, mercifully!"

Sibyl took the package, and turned away from Adele, so as to bring the envelope between the pillow and her face. With her lips resting against it she struggled with the hope and fear and remorseful love that overwhelmed her.

"Oh, my darling!" she murmured, "can you ever forgive me, if I have wronged you so deeply?"

Turning after a time, she handed the package back to Adele.

"Read it to me, my sister," she said. "I could not see the letters for my tears."

CHAPTER XXX.

A LIFE-WRONG.

AND here is what Adele read for the second time:

"MY LOVED THOUGH INJURED WIFE:

"Let me begin by asking your forgiveness for having brought you within the baleful shadow of my life; and when I am dead, and you pass in review the love I gave you during our one short year of happiness, if you believe what is written here, I know you will not withhold your forgiveness."

"For the follies of my youth I have but one excuse—I was denied a father's care; and though I loved my mother tenderly, I rebelled against being 'tied to her apron-string,' so that her counsels had not the weight with me that their wisdom deserved."

"Looking upon pleasure as the end of living, my companions were selected from among what is known as 'fast' young men. At seventeen years of age I drank liquor and smoked tobacco with the freedom of a man, and even gambled on a small scale. That I should contract debts was but a part of the life I was leading; but I always meant to pay them."

"With this record I fell under the charge of forgery! My life gave the motive, and a package of the money I had received from the bank was found on my person."

"It was hopeless to try to convince the world that I was not guilty; but, Sibyl, my wife! will you believe me when I declare, by our sad love and by the memory of my dead mother, that I was innocent? I did not indorse the check, and I did not knowingly receive one penny of the money got on it. Sibyl, you will read these words when I am dead. By my hope of heaven and final justification before you, they are true! The check was given to me by Paul Harney, already indorsed; I collected the money on it, and gave it to him—every cent! How the package of money afterward found in my pocket came there, I do not know. It must have been put there while I was intoxicated by some person in league with Paul Harney, for the express purpose of fixing the forgery upon me."

"Sibyl, do not think me a drunkard. I was not. That was the only time in my life that I ever lost self-mastery; and I believe that then I was drugged."

"In the excitement of the time I could only reiterate my innocence; but since then I have had twenty years for reflection; and I now believe that I was betrayed by one whom I then considered a friend—John Boardman! I was with him all the evening. He had the best opportunity to put the money in my pocket, or to detect any one else in the act of doing so."

"But all this is now to no purpose. The past is dead and buried."

"In my prison my mother visited me, in company with the man she afterward married, Col. Egbert Stanhope, Adele's father. Almost crazed with a sense of utter helplessness under monstrous injustice, I threw myself upon my knees before them, and assured them of my innocence again and again by every sacred pledge I could think of."

"My mother believed me. Had she doubted me then, I believe I would have committed suicide, if I had had to starve myself to death by refusing food."

"As for Col. Stanhope, if he doubted my innocence, he dissembled his feelings. His love for my mother, which was extraordinary, may have led him to do that. Certainly he would have lost her as his wife had he acted otherwise than as he did."

"From whatever motive, he espoused my cause; and a father could not have done more for me than he did. But all proved of no avail. I was tried and condemned, and had sentence executed upon me—two years' imprisonment and branding in the palm!"

"Under her trouble my mother was completely prostrated. For my sake she would have deferred her marriage, as if I had died. But I knew that she needed the care that only he could give her, and added my solicitations to his, so that her scruples were overcome; and I believe that the preservation of her life was due to the tenderness with which he watched over her."

"While I was in prison my mother visited me for an hour every day. This saved me from despair."

"When my term was expired Col. Stanhope removed to the North with his wife and child, Adele, then a year old, and myself. By act of the Legislature of the State of Maine, he gave me his name. I shall never forget my mother's gratitude!"

"My mother's very tenderness to me was a constant reminder of the cloud that had fallen

upon my life; and I was seized with a morbid dread of every one who knew of the indelible brand in my palm. I longed to be alone among strangers. Seeing that I was sinking into a brooding monomania, she finally yielded to my incessant entreaties, and gave her consent to my going abroad."

"For six years I wandered in a vast desert of humanity, never meeting a familiar face. I dared not make friends, lest they should learn the story of that brand of ignominy that burned like a quenchless fire in my palm. As for love, how could I drag the woman I loved down to—Oh, God! Sibyl, my wronged wife! to the fate I have given you!"

"After six years the man to whose generosity I owed so much died; and I was called home to console my widowed mother. She placed my sister Adele in my arms, and followed the man who had become necessary to her existence."

"I cannot tell you what a boon to my aching heart was the gentle, loving child of seven. I loved her and still love her second only to you. I dedicated my life to her, nor cared for the love of any other woman until I met you."

"Then, my wife, came the keenest agony and the greatest joy of my wretched life. You know the circumstances that brought us together. Had I been alone, I might have torn myself away; but I saw that my sister was attracted by your brother, and he by her. This, together with the overpowering love I conceived for you at first sight, led me to temporize, and temporizing I became lost."

"My strange behavior when Felix proposed for my sister's hand was not, as you interpreted it at the time, chiefly due to pain at losing her, though I confess my heart turned sick with a sense of loss. But in my absorbing passion for you I had forgotten all about her possible love for Felix. It burst upon me a complete surprise, and with it came the thought that, after their marriage, the secret of my life might be discovered, and Felix in his pride might turn against me and perhaps treat her coldly, when he would break her heart."

"For the first time I saw that my life might prove a curse to her. Then, too, how could I be related to you, and meet you, as would be unavoidable, without telling my love? The two women whom I loved could reap only misery from association with me!"

"Sibyl, when you came to me that night—when I saw in your face that you loved me, I became intoxicated with delight, and cast every scruple behind me. I swore then to possess you at any and every hazard. My secret might never be discovered, and if it was, your love might triumph over everything else, and we might be happy in each other, in spite of the world."

"Up to that time I was not sure whether or not John Boardman recognized me, though it was a constant dread. When he denounced me I was paralyzed. But you asked me to let my life be my vindication, and then I deceived your brother."

"This statement cannot alter the world's verdict, but I write it in the hope that you will receive it into your heart, and that the belief that I do not merit your contempt may make your sorrow less hard to bear."

"Oh, my injured wife! now that I am dead—for this will come to you as a voice from the grave—can you believe me?—can you forgive me? Think of the year that you have lain next to my heart! If I were infamous, would no word or look have betrayed me?—could I have deceived you so completely?"

But here the reader was interrupted.

"No! no!" cried Sibyl, rising to her feet, now strong in her great love. "I have heard enough. Let us go to him at once. Oh! if a life of untiring devotion can repay him in part for all that he has suffered, I pray God to spare his life to me!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

"YOU ARE NO LONGER A CORNISH!"

A GRAND light was in the young wife's face

as she rose to her feet.

It was answered by a look of gladness and love in Adele's speaking countenance.

"Are you strong enough, dear?" she asked, seeking to support her.

"Strong!" echoed Sibyl. "I shall never know weakness again until I have fallen at his feet and craved his forgiveness for that other weakness of faith in the eternal constancy of soul. Why could I not see that such a nature as his was incapable of such a crime! Oh, Adele! what a moment it must have been when I added the last drop of bitterness to his cup of wrong!"

"There! there! dear, you will make it all up to him."

"He wanted to die to relieve me of his presence!" sobbed Sibyl.

"But when he sees you and knows that you trust him and love him still, he will be eager to live, Sibyl; the scorn of all the world will weigh nothing with him, if only you believe in him," was the gentle assurance of Adele.

"Bless you, my sweet comforter!" murmured Sibyl, kissing her sister. "But he shall not have the scorn of the world. There must be some way of establishing his innocence, and our love must find it."

"I am with you! Oh! if it could be brought about!"

"It can and shall!"

So they talked, while Sibyl was arraying herself to go to her husband.

When she was ready she rung the bell for her maid.

"Where is my mother?" she asked.

"In her room."

"And Mr. Cornish and M. Bourdoine?"

"Smokin' in de library."

"Tell my mother that I wish to see her at once in the library. Then get yourself and the baby ready to go out."

"Yes, missus."

"What are you going to do?" asked Adele, when the girl was gone.

She had turned pale at the prospect of meeting Felix.

"I shall tell them of my husband's innocence, and that from this moment I cast my lot with him."

"But they will not believe in him."

"That can make no difference with my duty, or purpose."

"Dear, you have more strength than I."

"I only hope that it is not found too late," said Sibyl, struggling with a sob.

The maid reappeared.

"Has my mother gone to the library?" asked Sibyl.

"Yes, missus."

"Come, Adele, let us go down."

"Oh! must I go?"

The girl turned pale, and hung back trembling.

"You will not deny me your support?" asked Sibyl, smiling faintly—"both physical and moral, dear."

Without more ado Adele put her arms about her sister-in-law, and together they descended to the library.

On entering the library and seeing only her son and M. Bourdoine, Mrs. Cornish had asked:

"Is not Sibyl here?"

"Sibyl!" repeated Felix. "What could she be doing here?"

"But she sent for me."

"I have seen nothing of her. I supposed that she was unable to leave her room."

"So did I. I will go to see."

But as she opened the door Sibyl and Adele approached along the hall.

In blank amazement Mrs. Cornish fell back and let them enter the room. Then she assumed her most frigid *hauteur*.

"Felix, what is the meaning of this?" she asked. "How did that person gain admittance to the house?"

Both Felix and M. Bourdoine started to their feet.

Adele dared not raise her eyes from the floor. Now she required support instead of rendering it.

Felix stared, flushed scarlet, and then turned deadly pale.

"It might be well to ask Sibyl; and also what is the meaning of her being dressed to go out," he suggested, struggling to control his voice.

"I am come to answer your questions, and more," said Sibyl, standing erect and speaking in firm tones.

Instinctively she put her arm about Adele, knowing that she was being crushed by her lover's coldness.

"Felix Cornish," she went on, "how dared you attempt the life of my husband?"

"Your husband!" sneered Felix, bitterly.

"Yes, my husband! Sir, you have made a grave mistake, for which I will not accord my forgiveness until you have shown sincere signs of repentance."

"What! do you upbraid me for vindicating you honor?"

"My honor cannot be vindicated by murder!"

"Sibyl! do not talk nonsense," interposed Mrs. Cornish. "Your brother did what any

gentleman would have done under the circumstances; and if the affair had ended fatally to the base wretch whose imposture provoked it, he would have got no more than his deserts."

"Mother," said the girl, sadly, "I am pained to see you so vindictive. But I have come to say that instead of holding resentment against Egbert Stanhope, we have all reason to ask his pardon for having wronged him."

"Wronged him!" cried Felix.

"Wronged him!" echoed Mrs. Cornish, disdainfully.

"*Pardieu! qu'est-ce que cela?* (what now?)" muttered M. Bourdoine.

"Yes," replied Sibyl, "as only an innocent man can be wronged by a false verdict and the desertion of all his friends."

"Innocent!" again repeated Felix.

"You had better say *insolent!*" cried Mrs. Cornish, implacably. "Has he sent this—this lady to delude you again with more lies?"

"Mother, forbear!" said Sibyl, sternly.

"Your disdain cannot affect Adele Stanhope. She has never done anything to forfeit the name of lady in the fullest and highest sense of the word."

"For instance, by smuggling herself into a house—" began Felix, bitterly; but he stopped dead short.

A pair of heavenly blue eyes, swimming in tears and filled with wondering reproach, were raised to his face for a single instant, and dropped to the floor again. Then the crystal tears trickled one by one down her wan cheeks.

Felix took a single step forward and extended his arms.

"Adele, forgive me!" he cried.

Again her eyes went to his face, but with a frightened look, and she shrunk away from him, with a quickly-suppressed cry of apprehension.

His arms dropped to his side, and he stood rooted to the spot.

"Felix, you are beside yourself!" cried his mother.

"And an infernal fool to boot!" muttered the young man.

"My husband thought that all the world was equally hard, and did not intend that the evidence of his innocence of the crime of which he was falsely convicted should reach me while he lived," said Sibyl, now answering the mother's question.

"Evidently!" interrupted Mrs. Cornish, with a sneer, and a disdainful glance at Adele.

"It is true, madam; as Felix can testify, if he will," said Sibyl, with a *hauteur* not surpassed by her mother's. "The man who was perhaps mortally wounded by your son, and yet forbore to fire at him, has some slight claim upon you for courtesy, at least."

"He has his unfortunate predisposition to fraud to thank for that state of facts," said Felix. "As he went so far as to fire in my direction, how could I know that he was not firing at me?"

"The fact stands, that he was willing to give you your bloodthirsty satisfaction without learning you any malice. But we are losing time. Here is legal proof of his right to the name he bears, and also what was intended to be his dying testament to his innocence of crime."

And she laid the papers on the table before her brother.

Felix glanced at them.

"What more is this than his bare assertion of his innocence?" asked Felix.

"Nothing. But is not that sufficient?"

"Hardly!"

"Does the expectation of death give it no solemnity?"

"Men frequently testify to lies on their deathbed to clear their character."

"But his character as we know it?" urged Sibyl.

"Weighs nothing in evidence against the commission of a particular crime twenty years ago. A man is not necessarily bad in every thing who yields to strong temptation in one thing. I have seen the evidence that he did commit this forgery; and he has absolutely nothing to oppose to it but his bare denial."

"That is ample for me!" declared the wife, proudly.

"What do you purpose to do?" asked Felix.

"To return to my wronged husband, to whom I can never sufficiently atone for my base desertion at the very moment when he needed me most!"

She was right royal in her self-denunciation.

Adele worshiped her.

"What! go back to that branded felon?" cried Mrs. Cornish.

"I am going to that wronged man and outraged husband, and on my knees beg him to take me back to the place I have forfeited."

"Sibyl, stop!" said Felix. "You are not bound to that man. Any court in the world would grant you a divorce from a marriage procured by such fraud."

"A divorce!" she cried, drawing herself up with blazing eyes and quivering nostrils. "Felix Cornish, you must have strangely misunderstood me!"

"And do you persist in returning to him?"

"Return to him!—return to the father of my child!"

She choked with emotion. Tears sprang to her eyes. Her face was irradiated with a love that transfigured it.

"Shall you go to him?" urged Felix.

"Yes!" she cried, "as I would seek Heaven!"

"Then you are no longer a Cornish!" cried Felix, white with fury. "We have no forgers among us, nor wives of forgers!"

"I at least have a son!" said Mrs. Cornish.

"Until now I thought I had a daughter!"

"Mother!" cried Sibyl, with terror in her eyes. "Can you turn from me?"

She went toward her parent with extended arms, but the proud woman avoided her by going to the other side of the table.

"Do not touch me!" she cried. "It is you who are leaving us."

Without a word Felix turned his back upon her.

For a moment Sibyl gazed upon her relatives in hurt amazement.

"Be it so!" she said, finally, in a choking voice. "Come, my sister, let us go."

"Stop! stop!" cried Adele, detaining her.

"Oh! they cannot cast you off like this!"

"Have not you heard?" replied the discarded daughter. "Come! we have wasted too much time."

"Felix! oh, Felix!" cried Adele, breaking through all reserve.

He never moved. His broad back was pitiless.

"There! have you had enough?" said Sibyl, almost fiercely; and catching the weaker woman by the arm she fairly dragged her toward the door.

But there came an interruption from an unexpected source.

CHAPTER XXXII.

REUNITED!

"*Voxe momment!*" cried the Frenchman, stepping forward. "From ze time my little pupil say to me—*Je vous aime* (I love you), *papa Bourdoine!*—I have for her ze love paternal. *Allons donc!* if she go to ze man vich is vone rogue, so moche more she need ze friendship *desinteresse* (disinterested.) If Madame Stanhope vill accept ze fealty humble—"

And shrugging his shoulders and turning the palms of his hands toward her, he awaited her decision.

Sibyl turned, greatly touched.

"M. Bourdoine," she said, "may I still count on your friendship?"

"Madame," said the Frenchman, tragically, "t'ree day ago I am ze deadly foe of ze man zat I tink have offer ze affront unpardonable to my beloved pupil. Tick! tick! tick!—t'ree day"—holding up three fingers, "my pupil say he is innocent! *Allons!* M. Bourdoine is her friend; he say, too, 'he is innocent!'"

With grateful tears Sibyl clasped the hand of her honest friend.

"Will you come with us?" she asked.

"*Certainement!*"

And opening the door, he stood bowing for the ladies to pass him.

A moment Sibyl hesitated on the threshold.

Neither of the remaining tenants of the room showed any signs of relenting.

Blinded by tears, the unhappy woman went out, and the door closed between her and her kindred.

When they were really gone, Mrs. Cornish went into violent hysterics. Felix summoned attendance, and then passed into the drawing-room, where, unobserved, he could look through the curtains on the driveway.

He saw his sister led to the carriage and assisted to enter. Then Adele followed, trembling perceptibly. The nurse, with her little charge, and M. Bourdoine took the front seat.

As the carriage rolled away, two white faces one near the glass and one further back, peered through, as if to take a last look at Riverside mansion.

Felix sunk into a chair and covered his face with his hands. Pride had held her away, but now love exacted terrible reprisals.

As they approached the house where her husband lay, Sibyl was seized by violent agitation, that almost prostrated her. Clinging to Adele, she whispered:

"Oh, if we should be too late!"

"But we shall not be, dear," was the gentle assurance. "Now you must calm yourself. Of course he cannot bear excitement."

"I will be calm. See!"

And by a violent effort she held herself still for a moment.

"I will go to him first," said Adele, "and prepare him."

"But do not keep me waiting long. I cannot bear it."

"No. I will not. Oh! dear, you will give him new life. He will now surely get well."

"God grant that he may!"

They reached the house and were received by the farmer's wife, who was much flurried at the influx of so much grand company.

"Has my patient awakened?" asked Adele.

"He's slept just like a lamb, mum," was the reply.

While the trembling wife was conducted to an apartment where she could remove her wraps, Adele entered the sick-chamber.

As if the rustle of her garments disturbed him, the invalid moved uneasily and then opened his eyes.

Instantly she was at his side, reading his face eagerly.

"Oh! dear, your sleep has done you so much good!" she said.

She could not repress the great joy that filled her soul. It irradiated her face; it sparkled in her eyes; it thrilled through the cadences of her voice.

"Have I slept long?" asked the sick man.

"For over three hours, you darling!"

"What is it, Ade? Why are you so flushed? Why do you speak so impulsively? And you have your wraps on—where have you been?"

"Oh! such a string of questions!" she cried.

She could not keep her hands off him, but taking his face between her two palms, bent down and kissed him.

"First, I am flushed and speak impulsively because I am happy—there!"

A thought of Felix flashed through her mind, but she swallowed the lump that rose in her throat, fought back the tears that threatened to come, and smiled determinedly.

"Next, I have been out and— Now, will you be real good and hurry up and get well, if I tell you some good news?"

A look of despondency came into his face, and he was about to speak, when she stopped him.

"Tut! tut! not with such a face as that. From this time forth we are not going to have a sour look from you. We're going to leave the dumps and the megrims for those who have no better occupation."

Her words, so unlike his sympathetic little sister, arrested his attention, as she intended they should. He looked puzzled. What was the meaning of this strange mood?

"I have brought you something—oh, so nice!—something that you will like ever so much!"

A quick flush came to his cheeks, and faded again, as though a hope had sprung up and vanished as quickly as realized.

"What is it, dear?" he asked.

"Something warm!—and soft!—and pretty!—and that you love very much! It's not bigger than that!"—holding her hands about two feet apart—"and weighs—oh, ten pounds!"

"Adele!" he cried, half rising, and catching her hands.

"Hush!" she admonished, putting him back gently. "You must not get excited. If you do, I'll not tell you another word. As it is, I know I'm flying directly in the face of the doctor's orders."

"Ade, don't trifle with me!"

"My darling, do you think I could be happy if you had cause to be wretched?" asked the girl, laying her cheek against his with a sudden rush of tenderness. "Wait one moment!"

And she slipped out of the room, leaving him to lie with his hands over his eyes, striving to repress the wild beating of his heart.

"Well! may I go to him?" was Sibyl's eager salutation, as Adele entered the room where she was waiting. And trembling in every limb the young wife rose, as if to set out at once.

Adele caught her in her arms and hugged her with all her might.

"Oh, you love!" she cried. "It's all right. You ought to have seen his face brighten at the first hint."

"And he will rally?"

"He'll live to be a hundred!"

"There! Let me go. God bless you, my sister!"

"Not yet. Have patience a little while. Let me take the baby first."

She took the child from his nurse.

"The little angel is looking his best and his brightest!" she said, kissing him ecstatically.

"Oh! do not keep me waiting!" pleaded Sibyl, with clasped hands.

"Repress every trace of emotion," directed Adele. "We're all going to be happy now, and you must look it."

"I will!" promised Sibyl, pledging herself to an impossibility without a particle of hesitancy.

Egbert lay with his eyes on the door when Adele entered. He caught his breath and turned deathly pale, when he saw what she held in her arms.

Adele glided forward and put the child on the bed.

"There! that is my Christmas present!" she said.

The little one reached out its chubby hand, clutched its fingers in Egbert's mustache, and crowded.

The man kissed the hand, gathered the child to his heart and lay perfectly still, with closed eyes. Between the lids oozed tears of gladness and gratitude. His cup of happiness was brimming over!

Adele stood waiting, with clasped hands. Though she smiled, tears streamed from her eyes like rain.

For perhaps a minute there was a dead silence, save for the crowing sound occasionally uttered by the child. Then Egbert opened his eyes.

Reaching for his sister's hand he drew it to his lips.

"God bless you, my love!" he aspirated. "I can never pay you for this moment."

He paused a moment to command his voice, and then said:

"Let her come now!"

Adele went out. Sibyl was waiting in the hall.

Mutely the girl pushed her into the room, and closed the door.

The husband and wife were reunited!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A NOBLE MISSION.

THE young wife had returned.

A moment she stood motionless at the door, as if awaiting for assurance of her reception.

A faint voice came to her from the bed, calling:

"Sibyl, my wife!"

Like a shadow she sped across the intervening space and dropped on her knees at the bedside.

Her arms were about him. His arms held her in a feeble embrace. Their lips met. Their child lay between them, within their encircling arms. All their world was at this focal point.

"My darling, I am forgiven!" he asked, faintly.

"No!" she replied. "Yours is not the need. But I—I dare not ask you!"

He smiled.

"We are quits, then. Let us put the past behind us."

"Not altogether. See!"

She drew his hand round and kissed the gloved palm.

He winced.

"No!" she said. "You must not feel hurt. Rather rejoice; for now there is nothing in all the world between us. We are soul to soul, or, better, soul within soul! This is a closer tie than we could otherwise have had. I love you now the more tenderly because you have need of reparation for all you have suffered."

"My generous darling!" he murmured.

"Do you know, my husband," she said, "I love this one hand better than before I loved both!"

And she rested her cheek on it, as she nestled her head close to his on the pillow.

Egbert was struck with the caress.

"My darling!" he murmured, with tears springing to his eyes, "you have touched me more than words can tell. My mother died with her cheek resting on my palm like that!"

A smile of ineffable happiness overspread the wife's face.

"Oh! I am so glad that I unconsciously imitated her tenderest caress! Now you will know that I love you as she did."

So they renewed their pledges of love, given a year ago and interrupted by the unavailing of the branded palm.

But presently there was a gentle knock at the door, and Adele entered.

"I have been very indulgent," she said, smiling, "and you must be very good in return."

My patient has had all the excitement he can bear, until he has had another nap."

"Why, there's nothing the matter with me now," replied Egbert. "I shall be as well as ever in a few days."

"No more talk about dying?" asked Adele, slyly.

"Thanks to you, love, I have now the panacea of life—hope!" said her brother.

"We owe everything to you, dear. How can we thank you?" said the now happy wife.

"Take time to think about it," said unselfish Adele, with a smile. "Meanwhile—"

And she drew the curtains and darkened the room.

Then, holding his wife's hand clasped in his, Egbert Stanhope sunk into a dreamless, peaceful slumber, from which he awoke "a new man."

"My dear sir," was the doctor's verdict, when he saw his clear eye and animated look, "we have found the medicine you most needed. From this time I have only to look on and see you get well without my aid."

On the succeeding day M. Bourdoine was admitted to the sick-chamber.

"Zero can no longer be antagonism between us—at least on my side," he said. "From the determination of my pupil I cannot demur. Her enemy is my enemy—her friend my friend. Note?"

Egbert took the proffered hand cordially.

"I could not withhold my friendship from one who had proved so true to my wife, even if I felt personal hostility toward him, which I have never felt toward you," he replied, and the temporary breach was repaired.

Under the gentle ministrations of his fair nurses Egbert's recuperation was rapid. Soon he was able to be removed to more commodious quarters in the city; but when he began to talk of returning to his Northern home, a family confab was called at once.

"Egbert," said his wife, "Adele and I have been in consultation, and have conceived a scheme which may strike your man's mind as impracticable; but, dear, nothing was ever accomplished without trying, and we want you to permit us to try."

"To try what?" asked Egbert.

"My husband," said the wife, taking his hand and gazing tenderly into his face, "to our love for you the opinion of the world can make no difference; but, dear, for your sake we want to establish your innocence so that all will be compelled to acknowledge it."

Egbert shrunk back and frowned with pain.

"The right must be vindicated, Bertie!" urged Adele, coming to his other side, and putting an arm around his neck.

He shook his head sadly.

"After twenty years!" he asked. "All that love and money could do was done when the events were fresh. What can you accomplish now, when everything is forgotten?"

"But accident may favor us," urged Sibyl; "or the perpetrators of the crime, now being off their guard, may give us the clew. Stranger things have happened. And, my husband, for the sake of our child let us make one effort! If we fail we have nothing to lose; and if we win—Oh, Egbert!"

And she sunk weeping on his breast.

"If we win!"

The words rung in Adele's ears. If they won—why, what would stand between her and Felix?

She had not a particle of that selfish vindictiveness which people call pride. As for any injury or slight to herself, she would have forgotten it all and leaped into Felix's arms at the first sign of contrition on his part.

But before her recollection rose a picture of a smoking weapon in Felix's hand, and her brother falling to the ground to welter in his own blood; and it was as if a hand of ice were laid on her heart.

That stood between them; and the vindication of Egbert could not wash the stain of blood from Felix's hand!

Overcome by a deadly faintness, she murmured some unintelligible excuse, and hastened from the room.

"Egbert," said his wife, when they were alone, "have you noticed how thin and wan Adele is getting?"

"Yes. She has confined herself too closely in nursing me."

"It is not that. As long as your injuries were critical, her anxiety for you took her thoughts from her own sorrow. But now she is pining for Felix."

Egbert's face saddened.

"That is the one cloud on my happiness," he said. "But she has not uttered a word of com-

plaint, and she always seems cheerful, so that I hoped she was becoming reconciled, if indeed his treatment of her had not killed her love."

"Egbert, she has the bravest and most unselfish heart that ever was. She would die before she would damp our happiness with her sorrow. And nothing that Felix could do to her would lessen her love for him. For the rest, she weeps when she has retired, so that she will not have to meet us before morning, and in her sleep she moans piteously."

"What can be done?" asked Egbert.

"Do you not see? If the cause of Felix's hostility to you is removed, there will be nothing to keep them apart. She will be only too glad to forgive him everything. And Felix loves her—you who have not seen his inner nature cannot know how well."

"It is so hopeless a task."

"But you will let us try?"

"I will put no impediment in your way."

"Oh, thank you! We shall succeed. We must succeed! And if we bring Felix and Adele together, it will be some return for the happiness we owe to her."

So these two women set out on their mission, the one hoping in part to pay a debt of gratitude, knowing nothing of the other barrier which would be yet unsurmounted, and the other accepting in silence her hard fate and devoting herself unselfishly to those she loved.

Would their labors be rewarded?

CHAPTER XXXIV.

JAMES VESEY, DETECTIVE.

THE foregoing caption appeared on the doorstep of a certain hallway, on a business street in New Orleans, and again on a door in the second story of the building.

It was read with mingled feelings of hope and misgiving by three persons, who, having read it, entered the room.

Within they found a very small boy seated on a very high stool, who motioned them to seats with a wave of his hand, and told them that Mr. Vesey was busy at present, but would give them audience shortly.

In an inner room stood a man of perhaps thirty, before a contrivance in the wall by which he could look into the outer office, without himself being seen.

He seemed very much struck by the beauty of the two ladies who had called upon him. One piercing glance at the gentleman escorting them satisfied him in that direction, and he returned to the more congenial occupation of contrasting the rival types of feminine loveliness—a pure blonde and a glowing brunette.

After an interval of perhaps ten minutes he seated himself at a desk and struck a bell.

The small boy jumped down off the stool, opened the door of communication, and waited for the ladies and their escort to enter.

Mr. Vesey was busy folding a sheet of legal-cap paper. As he slipped it into a pigeon-hole in his desk, he rose and received his visitors with marked courtesy.

While Sibyl Stanhope told her story Mr. Vesey listened mutely, taking notes.

"That, sir," said the lady in conclusion, "is the narrative. I have suppressed the names, since if you do not undertake the case, it will do you no good to know them. Now, assuming that the man is innocent, is there any chance of establishing the fact before the law?"

M. Bourdoine nodded his head repeatedly in approval of Sibyl's statement of the case, while his face glowed with admiration of his pupil.

Adele gazed at the detective, as if he were the oracle of Egbert's fate.

Before giving his decision the detective compressed his lips reflectively, and went over his notes.

"There has been an interval of nine-teen years!" he said, indicating by dragging the syllables that nineteen years was a long time.

"Yes," said Sibyl, and both her heart and Adele's went down to zero.

"The clerk, whom we assume to be the real forger, or at least the prime mover in the matter, if his hand did not really execute the false signature, is alive and a partner in the business, the senior partner having died."

"Yes."

"The young man whom we assume to have been a possible accomplice—Ah! is he still living?"

"Yes."

"His present occupation?"

"He is a professional gambler."

"Ah! In the city?"

"I do not know where he is."

"Last seen?"

"In Memphis."

"How long since?"

"Three months."

"He might be found somewhere on the river, I reckon."

"I think that he pursues his calling on the boats between St. Louis and New Orleans."

"The messenger boy is still living?"

"Yes."

Sibyl's heart rose in her throat, as she thought how near he had been to death.

"Is he accessible?"

"If necessary."

"You suspect no one else of complicity in the affair, or of knowledge of it in any way?"

"No."

The detective tapped his desk with his penholder, and thought.

His visitors hung in breathless suspense.

Presently he looked up and fixed his eyes on Sibyl's face.

"Madam," he said, "you must not be too sanguine of success."

"We are not," said Sibyl.

"Nineteen years ago is a very long time."

"I grant it."

"And much of the evidence that might have existed then may now be hopelessly destroyed."

"We have considered that."

"If you were seeking to recover money," pursued the detective, "I should call it the poorest of poor investments. But reputation is another thing. People are not always disposed to limit its value by a fixed sum. However, I feel it my duty to say to you that unless you can afford to throw away hundreds, and perhaps thousands of dollars, without advancing one step toward the attainment of your object, you had better not embark in this undertaking."

"Money is no object to us. We shall not count the cost. All we desire is the knowledge that everything has been done that can be done to accomplish the end."

"After spending ten thousand dollars and a year of time, I warn you, you may stand just where you do to-day."

"Oh! is it so hopeless as that?" sighed Adele.

"That is the dark side of the picture," said Sibyl, firmly.

"Yes," admitted the detective.

"Now what is there on the affirmative?"

"I overlooked one question. Is the clerk, now a member of the firm, rich?"

"I do not know."

"At any rate, the business must have been a large one, to involve a check of that amount."

"Yes."

"Well, assuming that the clerk had an accomplice or accomplices, they may not have been so successful in a money point of view as he. Upon assurance of immunity from the law, they might be induced, in consideration of a few hundreds or thousands of dollars, according to their estimate of their own reputation, to turn Stato's evidence in an arraignment of the clerk for conspiracy."

"If such a person can be found, you may promise him a hundred thousand dollars!" said Sibyl, flushing with excitement.

The detective smiled and elevated his brows slightly.

"There is one drawback to this course," he said. "It would look as if we were bribing a scoundrel to perjure himself. As the man attacked is of high reputation, there would have to be strong corroborative evidence to support the oath of our witness, which we may safely assume does not exist."

Sibyl turned pale. Her brief hopes were dashed to the ground.

"This gambler's oath, for instance, unsupported, would count for nothing against that of a respectable business man."

"In any event, money would not induce him to testify in favor of the man he wronged," said Sibyl, unconsciously assuming that Jack was really guilty.

"The chances are, then, one step more removed."

"Is there no other course?"

"One."

"And that is?"

"This quondam clerk might be watched. It is among the possibilities that, in his prosperity, he may have been paying 'hush-money' to some one. If this can be established, together with plausible evidence of the conspiracy, we may make something out of it."

"Mr. Vesey," said Sibyl, "begin the surveillance you suggest to-day?"

The question of remuneration was then dispatched, and when Mr. James Vesey bowed his patrons out of a door other than that by which they had entered (an innocent business trick by which the detective was enabled to be always "busy" when called upon) he was radiant with

affability, and the first step had been taken toward establishing Egbert Stanhope's innocence of crime.

CHAPTER XXXV.

M. BOURDOINE TAKES THE DETECTIVE FEVER.

DETECTIVE VESEY at once entered upon the task of "piping" Paul Harney. He found that he lived in grand style and supported an extravagant family.

He had no difficulty in gaining an opportunity to study the man himself. He noted the furtive restlessness of the eye, the haggard look of one whose rest was broken, and a predisposition to nervous trepidation which might mark one who was a prey to corroding care.

Having struck up an acquaintance with the broker's clerk, Vesey learned that Mr. Harney had been ailing of late. Early in December—in fact, beginning on the first or second of the month—a spell of indisposition had confined him to his house for a week or ten days, and he had not seemed right well since.

Next James Vesey had a spy in the very citadel, in the person of a household servant.

From this source he learned that the cotton-broker not unfrequently occupied his library until far into the night, when an ear at the key-hole might hear him pacing incessantly up and down, muttering to himself and moaning as if in great distress.

Lastly, the detective had Paul Harney under personal surveillance, from the time he left his palatial home in the morning until he had returned to it for the night.

For six weeks he discovered absolutely nothing.

The suspense told upon Sibyl in an unwonted pallor of the cheek and, when she was not dissembling lightness of spirits in Egbert's presence, in an air of waiting, ever waiting.

Putting her own trouble aside, Adele devoted herself to the task of cheering the sorely-tried wife.

M. Bourdoine was extravagant in his impatience, called the detective and his assistants dullards, and finally worked himself up to such a pitch, between his anxiety for his pupil and his own impatience of delay, that he set himself to watch Paul Harney.

"Sibyl," said her husband, when one day she returned to him with an unusual depression of spirits, "give up this vain pursuit."

"Why, we have but begun, dear," she replied, smiling with an effort.

"But you are being worn out by anxiety."

"My husband," replied the loyal wife, "when you have suffered twenty years, can not I watch one?"

"But the longer you cling to hope, the more bitter will be the inevitable disappointment."

"We are not prepared to concede that disappointment is inevitable, you know."

"My darling, I cannot have your health undermined. Let us go away from here, where your anxiety will not be so constantly on the strain. The detectives can work just as well without our immediate presence."

"Not yet, Egbert. Let me have my own way yet a little longer, my over-solicitous friend!" urged Sibyl, with an assumption of lightness that was pathetic, it was so veined with sadness.

The next day she had her reward.

M. Bourdoine rushed into her presence as wild with excitement as if he had just discovered a gold mine.

"Ah! *grace a ciel!* (heaven be praised!)" he cried, catching her hands and kissing them, "ze eye of love shall discern in ze darkness—ze impurity of love shall prevail against ze destiny implacable! My pupil, I salute your hand! Monsieur," turning to Egbert, "I embrace you vis ze congratulation heartfelt!"

Sibyl and Adele instantly took the infection of excitement. Even Egbert could not prevent the color from receding from his face.

"Oh, what is it, dear friend?" asked Adele.

"I am just from ze prince of detective, M. Vesey!"

"Yes! yes! And what has he discovered?"

"Ze woman!"

M. Bourdoine laughed at their puzzled looks.

"*El bien!* is not ze woman at ze bottom of all mischief?" he cried.

"Yes; but what of this woman?" asked Adele, willing to concede the argument in general, if only she could get at the facts in particular.

M. Bourdoine assumed his most melodramatic air.

"Conceive ze situation!" he said. "M. Craig goes out of town—"

"Yes," interrupted Adele, "he went the

day before yesterday, on a vacation of two weeks."

"Good! Ze arch-conspirator is alone in his private office—alone vis ze conscience troublesome. He pace to and fro. He frown. He pull his mustache."

"Visout, ze detective vatch vis sleepless eye."

"Well, a woman came to the office?"

"Ze voman!" cried M. Bourdoine, with an air of great mystery, and then carried on a dialogue with himself to this effect:

"Is she on foot?"

"At ze door—yes. But behold! around ze corner she have just stepped from a carriage!"

"She is note meanly dressed? ze beggar ride note in ze carriage."

"Eh bien! she is ze fashion-plate embodiment!"

"Beautiful!"

"Parbleu! how shall vone know! Ze vail envious hide her face like ze mask. Allons! nous avons un mystere! (Come, here is a mystery!)"

"And the woman entered the office?" asked Adele, fretting at M. Bourdoine's dramatic narrative.

"Enter, and is closeted, five—ten—fifteen—twenty minute vis ze arch-conspirator!"

M. Bourdoine paused to let this announcement have its full effect.

"Well?" urged Adele

"Ze detective get ze carriage and station eet at ze little distance. Zen he lie in wait."

"Ze voman comes fort!"

"Voila! her step is a stride, her carriage is erect, like vone who is clate. She pass near ze detective. She pant, like vone who have triumph. She is flushed. Her eyes sparkle through her vail."

"She enter her carriage. Ze detective enter his."

"Keep zat carriage in sight," is his order.

"Monsieur, eet shall be done," replies ze driver."

"As zey go, ze detective change his disguise."

"Ze carriage stop. Madame have enter ze bank! Eh bien! has she vone deposit to make?"

Again M. Bourdoine paused.

"Go on! go on!" urged Adele.

"Ze detective enter ze bank. V'ile madame deposit five hundred dollar—attend!—five hundred dollar!—he get change for five dollar and pass out."

"Vonce more he follow her to her place of abode!"

"All this may be consistent with the lady's innocence of blackmail, which seems to be your inference," observed Egbert.

"Hold vone moment! Ze detective goes back. Behold, M. Harney appear livid vis ze pallor of ze ghost. His knees tremble. He have ze aspect of terror. He enter ze carriage vich ze messenger boy have summoned, and drive home two hours before his usual time!"

"Allons, mon ami! qu'est ce que c'est que cela? (Come, my friend, what is the significance of all this?)"

"My dear," said Egbert, taking his trembling wife in his arms, "do not build too much hope upon this. It is most likely delusive."

She made no reply. She only rested in his arms, with her face hidden in his breast.

For a week detective Vesey "piped" Paul Harney's lady visitor. The information gained may be condensed in the following

SUMMARY:

1. Name—Mme. Angelice.
2. Nativity—French.
3. Style of living—Good to elegant.
4. Means of support—None visible.

M. Bourdoine's detective fever left him no rest, though it must be confessed that his methods lacked system. If he had accomplished results commensurate with the zeal and energy displayed, he would have left nothing for the professional detective.

On the evening of the day one week subsequent to the strange lady's visit to Paul Harney, the Frenchman was hurrying through the streets when a woman dressed in dark gray waterproof cloak came down a cross street and passed quickly before him. A puff of wind blew aside her vail, and he caught a glimpse of her face in the light of the street lamp.

"Ah! grace a Dieu!" cried the Frenchman, and caught her by the wrist.

The woman uttered a scream of affright and struggled to get away; but he would doubtless have held her, had not a new actor appeared on the scene—a tall, broad-shouldered fellow, who

with a single blow of his fist knocked M. Bourdoine hopelessly out of time.

Taking advantage of her release, the woman sped away in the darkness. But before she did so her eyes rested a moment in terror on the face of the man who had interfered in her behalf.

He, too, saw her face before she could drop her vail. A moment he stood as if undecided, and then, with an oath, he left M. Bourdoine to gather his scattered wits, and started in pursuit of the woman.

His momentary hesitation gave her an advantage, and he was just in time to see her enter a carriage and be driven rapidly away.

His chagrin was marked by a man who had been dogging the woman's footsteps on the other side of the street.

"Oho!" muttered the last-mentioned individual. "Here is another party in the field. Let us make his acquaintance."

Detective Vesey, for it was no other, transferred his attentions to the man who betrayed so much emotion on being eluded by the woman.

The latter retraced his steps until he reached the discomfited Frenchman.

"Ah! M. Longue Jacques!" cried M. Bourdoine, impulsively, and then—not because he recognized his assailant, since in fact he had not seen him, but remembering that he was now again hostile to the gambler—he bowed stiffly and passed on.

Long Jack looked after him, greatly puzzled. "What has he to do with her?" he muttered, and after a moment's thought brought his hands together with a sharp concussion, by way of accompaniment to a round oath.

Meanwhile the detective had scored a point. "Ah! my dear Long Jack! we seem to be coming to you at last. Come! come! three links form a chain."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PAUL HARNEY'S LADY VISITOR.

GOING back one week, we may enter Paul Harney's private office at the side of his strange lady visitor, though the detective was denied this advantage.

As she entered, the cotton-broker started from his chair with a smothered ejaculation, turned ghastly pale, and sunk back again, his hand shaking so that the eye-glasses, held between finger and thumb, rattled a tattoo on his desk.

The lady stared at him with the insolent effrontery of a petty tyrant.

"Well, monsieur, have you forgotten ze courtesy due a lady?" she asked, with a slight French accent.

"Be seated—pray, be seated!" said, or rather gasped, the broker, waving her to a chair.

"Merci! (thanks) you are very kind."

The lady seated herself, spreading out her silk skirt like a fan. She smiled at the broker, as if for approval.

Not heeding, if indeed he understood her thoughts, he said, hoarsely:

"Why have you come here?"

"Ciel! why should I come?"

The lady shrugged her shoulders and spread her jeweled fingers.

The broker frowned angrily.

"Only for more blood, you accursed vampire!" he muttered.

The lady laughed lightly.

"You bleed golden blood, my fairy goblin!"

"Do you not consider the danger?"

"To whom?"

"To me."

"Parbleu! what is that to me?"

Again the lady shrugged her plump shoulders and showed her pretty teeth.

"It is everything to you!" growled Paul Harney, with none of his wonted meekness.

"Ah! monsieur, I have no love for you, I assure you!"

"I have no need to be told that."

"You are my banker—that is all. Ha! ha! ha!"

"But if you ruin me, what will become of your cash account?"

"Ah! zat is impossible! Is not monsieur rich beyond computation? What ze little I demand! A bagatelle!"

"Indeed it is not a trifle! But this is not the point. If you bring suspicion upon me, and that leads to investigation, do you not see that your supplies will be cut off?"

"They will suspect that monsieur is an old gallant. What more?" asked the woman, with a laugh.

"That is not the worst. There are those who may go further back than that."

"Nineteen years! Believe me, it is long forgotten."

"It is not forgotten. The whole matter may be dragged to light again at any day."

"Not unless I drag it to light."

Paul Harney winced.

"The boy is not dead, and John Boardman's coming upon me again was not for nothing."

"Bah! zey have not a particle of proof. Suppose zey should league against you and Jack swear to his share in ze transaction. You dis-

pose of zem as blackmailers. Wisout what I hold—"

And she snapped her fingers contemptuously.

"In any event, there is no use in running unnecessary risk. Why not get the money—if you will have it—as heretofore?"

"Zere is no mistake about my determination to have it! I come to you here because I want more zan ze driblets you have been doling out to me."

"You are crowding me too hard. I cannot afford any considerable amount. Business has gone against us, and if I draw any money out now, when we want all we can get hold of, I shall be asked why."

"Mon Dieu! What more simple? A chaplet of pearls for your daughter—a diamond bracelet zat has caught ze fancy of your wife!"

"But a woman's fancy for jewelry will not be an acceptable excuse for crippling my business."

"M. Harney, I know nossing of business technicalities. But I have come for money; and I must have it."

"How much do you want now?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"Ten thousand devils!" cried Paul Harney, leaping from his seat.

"You misunderstand me, monsieur," said the lady, coolly. "Ten thousand dollars—not devils, surely."

"How am I to get ten thousand dollars?"

"Zat is your affair."

"But you are beside yourself. It is impossible."

"Oh, no. Monsieur would not go to prison for a paltry sum."

"But I will go to prison before I will be robbed like this."

"Robbed! Ha! ha! ha! It is amusing to hear monsieur talk about robbery."

"I can't raise the money—that's flat!"

"Ah, surely, Monsieur Harney, ze wealthy cotton-broker, has estates. He can find some Shylock who will give him ten thousand dollars on such security."

"They are mortgaged for all they will stand already. I cannot raise the money, I tell you."

"Listen!" said the woman, rising from her chair. "I have come to make a settlement with you. Paul Harney, am I ze only person who has proof of your crime?"

"I believe that you are."

"If you possessed it you would be a free man?"

A purple flush mounted to the broker's sal-low brow.

"Yes," he said, watching her closely, and apparently holding his breath.

"Would you give ten thousand dollars to stand where you could put ze world at defiance, and get what you have not had for years—one night of sleep perfectly free from fear?"

The man began to pant and wring his hands mechanically.

"Will you give me the proofs?" he asked, slowly.

"Yes," she replied. "I want to leave New Orleans, and ze United States, for zat matter—no matter why. I can't get any more out of you, and I have fixed upon ze original sum—ten thousand dollars—to sell out my hold on you."

"The price is very high."

"Not a word, or I will double it."

"When do you want the money?"

"This day week."

"You can have it to-morrow."

"See! Zat shows I am letting you off cheap. How eagerly you jump at my offer."

"If it must be done, it is as easy to be done to-morrow as later."

"And you are eager to get ze proofs? Is it not so?"

"Would I give you ten thousand dollars for them if I were not?"

"Truly! But I do not want ze money until zis day week. Some one might rob me, you know. I shall be ready to leave ze city by zat time."

"Shall I bring the money to the house on River Place?"

"Yes. Ten one-thousand-dollar bills—do you understand?"

"One week from to-night, then, at nine o'clock."

"Do not fail me, or the morning papers will contain sensational head-lines, with your name at the top!"

"It is unnecessary to threaten me."

"It can do no harm. Monsieur, my good banker, *adieu!*"

Madame Angelica swept a mocking courtesy and took her leave.

Paul Harney sunk back into his chair in a physical and moral collapse.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE HOUSE ON RIVER PLACE.

PAUL HARNEY had sustained a terrible trial. For nineteen years a portentous cloud had hung upon the horizon of his life, embittering every enjoyment that increasing wealth brought to him. Within a few months it had suddenly loomed black to the zenith, threatening to engulf everything. Now he had the promise of its quick and complete dissipation.

It was this reaction of feeling that made it necessary for him to send for a carriage and go home two hours before his usual time.

For the week following he was a prey to the wildest alternations of hope and fear.

Business in that state of mind was out of the question. He stayed at home on the plea of ill-health.

By means of mortgages on his estate he raised the money without difficulty.

On the night agreed upon he assumed a disguise, and with ten one-thousand-dollar bills in his pocket sought the appointed rendezvous.

River Place was in a quarter of New Orleans remarkable for the elegance of its mansions and for the dubious character of some of their tenants.

The particular house to which Mr. Paul Harney bent his steps was a place of assignation for *intriguants* of all sorts. Money closed the eyes and ears of its proprietors.

The door was opened by a tall, muscular negro, who showed Mr. Harney to the room he designated, where he was soon joined by Madame Angelica, deeply veiled, and with the outlines of her figure concealed by a gray waterproof cloak.

"Well," she said, "you are prompt, which is a sign of your eagerness."

"Have you got the proofs?"

"Ah! hear ze man! He will not give me time to become composed, after my walk."

"Give them to me at once, and here is your money."

"Pray, monsieur, do not approach too near to me."

Paul Harney had advanced, holding the money in one hand, and with the other extended to receive the proofs of his crime.

The lady coolly pointed a pistol at him, and thus checked his approach.

"What is the matter?" he asked, somewhat startled.

"One cannot be too cautious," said the lady, with a shrug and a laugh. "Ten thousand dollars is a tempting sum of money."

"It is indeed. But do you think I am likely to murder you for it?"

"No. But if you once held the proofs you might slip the money into the wrong pocket—your own—and snap your fingers in my face."

"That would be a merited termination to your plots."

"But one which I am not likely to permit."

"Nor I to attempt. Come! here is your money. Give me the proofs and let me go."

"Pray, lay the money on the center-table, there."

Paul Harney complied.

"Now retire, if you please, to the chair which you see at the other end of the room."

"You are extremely cautious."

"You have more strength than I. I must balance your muscle by my wit."

"What assurance have I that you will not decamp with the money, forgetting to leave me the proofs?" asked Mr. Harney, more because he was annoyed and wanted to pay her some of her own coin, than because he thought there was any likelihood of such a course on her part.

"You must risk so much," was the laughing response. "It is a concession of gallantry."

Mr. Harney retired to the end of the room furthest from the door.

Madame Angelica advanced to the marble-top center-table, laid her weapon ready at her hand, counted the money and examined the bills.

"Zey have a goodly look!" she observed, smiling with gratification.

She put the money somewhere beneath her waterproof cloak; then drew forth an envelope and laid it on the table.

"There, monsieur, are ze evidences against you. *Adieu!* I may never have ze pleasure of seeing you again. *Adieu!*"

There was a strange smile on her face as she began to walk backward toward the door of the room, holding the cocked pistol in her hand.

Paul Harney sprung forward to the table.

"Stop until I have examined the contents of the envelope!" he cried.

"It is not necessary. *Adieu!*" said the woman, still receding.

"But you shall stay! You may be deluding me."

"How can monsieur detain me? Ha! ha! ha!"

Mr. Paul Harney could find no ready answer to her question. She was armed. He was not. How could he have anticipated anything like this?

"*Adieu! Adieu!*"

Her mocking little nod and laugh were provoking, but he had no redress.

The door closed between them, and he was alone.

"By Heaven! if this is a fraud!" he muttered, tearing open the envelope with fingers that trembled so that they were almost useless.

To hold the inclosed paper still enough so that he could examine it, he had to spread it out on the marble table.

It was a single sheet of note-paper.

On one side was a brief note, written and signed by Paul Harney, and bearing date nineteen years earlier.

On the other side were several imitations of the signature of the firm of Edmonds & Craig. From one of them the pen had continued without lifting from the paper and traced the signature Paul Harney.

The pen had afterward been drawn several times across this last signature, as if the writer had noticed the linking of the forgery with his name, and felt an impulse to obliterate the latter, though of course expecting to destroy the whole paper in a few minutes.

The sheet could be folded so as to bring this signature into juxtaposition with that appended to the note on the other side of the paper, and they were as exact counterparts as the same hand could trace.

Paul Harney shuddered as he looked at this proof of his crime.

"Nineteen years!" he muttered. "That paper has cost me at least fifty thousand dollars! My God! how they have bled me! But is it the original? Why did she laugh so? She is a treacherous devil."

"At this distance of time I cannot tell whether that is my own writing or not. The paper does not look old enough. Ah! I must compare it with some that I have among my old letters. But I cannot do it until morning."

"Another sleepless night! Will rest never come?"

And weighted with uncertainty, he left the house.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A NEW COMPLICATION.

M. BOURDOINE was wild with excitement. He ran through the streets, now this way, now that, intercepting every woman who had any thing the appearance of the one who had slipped from his grasp.

In perhaps twenty minutes he became satisfied that she had effectually eluded him.

Then he went to the hotel where his friends were stopping.

"Ah! *grace a Dieu!*" he cried, catching Sibyl's hands, kissing them and letting his tears fall upon them, "ze *grande* reward of ze long year of waiting and vatching is come to me at last! *Ma pupille*, I claim your congratulations—you first of all ze world, because of your heart sympathique vich have always been open to ze sorrow of my life."

"What is it, my friend?" asked Sibyl, who first gathered from his rapid words that his excitement was not incident to the matter which lay nearest her heart.

"My friends—all!" cried M. Bourdoine, extending his hands, as if about to offer up a public prayer—"I have seen her!"

"Whom?" asked Adele and Sibyl, in chorus.

"Whom!" repeated M. Bourdoine. "For whom alone have I eyes, ears—senses all! HELENE!"

"Impossible!"

"After all these years?"

Even Egbert looked incredulous.

Every one had looked upon M. Bourdoine's search as chimerical.

"Dese eyes have been blessed for vone instant. It vas like ze flash of lightning. Ping!—pang! My soul is flooded vis ze beauty, ze ravishment!—my soul is engulfed in ze blackness of despair! Ping!—pang! She is before me!—she is gone!"

"But where did you see her?"

"Under ze gas-light."

"Oh! a chance resemblance, M. Bourdoine."

"*Parbleu!* does ze world hold two Helene? No! no! Ze crystal mold was broken after her creation! Ze light of her eye robbed ze world of half its light, and ve call it night! Helene, ze *offinite* of my soul, is here—in New Orleans! Helene! Helene! *enfin je t'ai trouve!* (at last I have found you!)"

And sitting down and bowing his head on the table, M. Bourdoine burst into tears.

His emotion was as transient as it was extreme. He soon recovered sufficiently to tell them how he had seen Helene, and how she had escaped him.

In the midst of his story Detective Vesey entered.

"Ah! M. Vesey," cried the Frenchman, running up to him, "I desire ze recommendation to ze detective competent. I have found Helene! But, *par St. Denis!* she have escape me on ze instant!"

The detective had already been put in possession of the outlines of M. Bourdoine's story; so the foregoing address was intelligible to him. But another idea was suggested.

"What! have you seen her?" he asked, eagerly.

"For vone instant, ven she escape in ze manner most extraordinary. I see her—I am knocked down by ze hand unseen—she is gone!"

"To-night?"

"Half an hour ago."

"In the street?"

"Yes. Under ze gas-light."

"M. Bourdoine, I think I can help you—and you me."

"Ah! I would note deprive my friends of your service."

"I can help you without prejudice to them."

"If you are sure of zat, I have great confidence in your ability."

"And now," pursued the detective, turning to his earlier patrons, "I have made some further discoveries."

"Oh! tell us!" cried Adele, eagerly.

"Long Jack is in the city!"

"Long Jack!"

"I have seen him!"

"And I, too!" cried M. Bourdoine. "I met him note vone minute after Helene escape me. I had forgotten him."

"But I thought that you were not acquainted with him," said Sibyl, to the detective.

"I heard him addressed by name; and the man answered your description."

"Oh!"

"That is not all."

"What more have you discovered, pray?"

"I have reason to believe that Long Jack is acquainted with Madame Angelica."

"Indeed! Why?"

"They appeared to recognize each other; and there seemed to be hostility between them."

"They cannot be confederates, then."

"They may have been. Rogues, like honest people, not infrequently fall out."

"And if they have been leagued," began Sibyl.

"And if the woman is now in some way connected with Mr. Harney," added Adele.

"I see you catch my idea," said the detective, interrupting her in turn. "The woman may be the link between Long Jack and Paul Harney."

"Oh! if it should prove true!" aspirated Adele, clasping her hands.

"But here is a new complication," pursued Detective Vesey. "I saw M. Bourdoine knocked down."

"Indeed?"

"Ah! monsieur, can you have witnessed ze outrage? But for zat Helene would not have elude me."

"You have Long Jack's interference to thank for that."

"How so?"

"His fist did the business for you."

"Impossible! He came up afterward."

"He pursued the lady, and then returned."

"*Grand ciel!* I will have his blood for it!"

"Oh! but what are you saying?" cried Adele, suddenly. "Is this Madame Angelica and the woman whom M. Bourdoine—Oh! they are both French! They cannot be—"

"But they are," declared the detective, smiling.

"One and the same!" cried Adele, breathlessly. "Exactly."

"Vat is zat you say, monsieur?" here cried M. Bourdoine, excitedly.

"The lady whom you call Helene is none other than the Madame Angelice in some way associated with Paul Harney."

"*Morbleu! Sang-dieu! Sacre-r-re!*"

M. Bourdoine went stamping about the room in anything but an amiable frame of mind.

"Enough, monsieur!" he cried, presently.

"You know vere she is to be found. I will see her at vonce, and set at rest all doubt."

"That is what I desire of you. Let us lose no time."

"But you will let us know the result of your visit?" asked Sibyl.

"We will return to-night."

"The suspense will be terrible until we hear from you."

"We will use all possible expedition."

M. Bourdoine walked rapidly to the house, where Madame Angelice occupied a flat on the second floor.

As they entered the lower door to the stairway a man brushed by them hurriedly.

M. Bourdoine turned to resent the uncere- monious jostle; but the offender had disappeared in the darkness.

The Frenchman and the detective had no sooner entered the house than they became aware of some unusual excitement.

Doors were opened suddenly, and there was the sound of hurrying feet and voices raised in consternation.

The Stanhopes waited long after midnight in their hotel; but neither M. Bourdoine nor detective Vesey made their appearance.

Let us see what detained them.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A PRECIOUS PAIR.

LONG JACK was more fortunate than M. Bourdoine.

Deferring the search for Madame Angelice until the morrow, he went to his hotel, where the detective, feeling that he could now put his finger on him, when he wanted him, left him to seek M. Bourdoine and use his apparent acquaintance with Madame Angelice as a means of himself forming her acquaintance.

But Long Jack became restless, and lighting a cigar, went out to walk himself into a calmer state of mind.

He had not been fifteen minutes on the street when a carriage drew up to the curbstone, and a lady in a dark gray waterproof cloak alighted and entered a doorway not ten paces ahead of him.

"By Heaven! that must be she!" he muttered.

With a few strides he gained the doorway.

He was just in time to see the woman disappear at the head of the stairs. Then a door opened, casting a bright light across the dimly-illuminated upper corridor, which was partially obscured by an entering figure, and then cut off by the closing of the door.

Ascending the stairs noiselessly, and approaching the door whence the light seemed to have proceeded, Long Jack listened and bent until his eye was at the keyhole.

The key prevented him from seeing anything. He could faintly hear some one moving in the room, and that was all.

Presently a bird began to trill, and then the listener heard a woman's voice chirruping to it and talking in cooing tones.

But there was a sound of footsteps in the lower hall. Some one had entered and was ascending the stairs. Long Jack would be detected if he stood longer before the lady's door.

He knocked on the door—a gentle knock, such as a woman's hand might have caused.

The chirruping sounds within the room ceased. The woman approached and opened the door.

There was a smile on her face, as if she expected some one whom she welcomed gladly. It turned to a look of dismay, when she saw a man in the doorway.

Before she could make an effort to prevent it, Long Jack entered and closed the door after him.

"Not a sound!" he said. "You have no reason to apprise your neighbors that you have a gentleman caller at this hour of the night," somewhat bitterly.

He had removed his hat before she opened the door, so that, the light falling full on his face, she recognized him at once.

She did not seem to fear him, though there was evident dislike strongly marked in the expression of her face.

"If you have come here only to insult me, sir, you need not prolong your stay. Ze way out is as convenient as ze way in," she said, flushing with anger.

"It would be difficult to insult you, I'm of opinion," he cried, contemptuously.

"You are not welcome here. Why do you come?"

"Because it suits my humor."

"You have had every cent of money you will get from me."

Jack laughed.

"You have come to recognize that as your only attraction, then?"

The woman flushed with wounded vanity.

"Ze time is not long gone when you were glad to spend your money for my adornment," she said; "zere must have been some other attraction then."

"Well, no," drawled Jack, affecting to scan her critically, "it doesn't date beyond the memory of man; but I looked at you then through lover's eyes, which are calculated to tone down slight defects. Besides, half a score of years or so have made inroads on your beauty."

"Enough! I care nothing for your criticism."

"Let us change the subject, then. You appear to be on the eve of taking your flight."

Long Jack glanced around on several trunks strapped as if for traveling.

"Well, am I accountable to you for my movements?" demanded Madame Angelice.

"Not the least in the world."

"That subject is disposed of, then. Come! we shall soon exhaust our topics of conversation, and I shall be relieved of your presence. What would you?"

"Those trunks are packed, are they not?"

"Yes."

"Where are you going?"

"Who knows? Around ze world, perhaps."

"Ah! shall you leave the country?"

"If it please me."

"When do you return to New Orleans?"

"Never."

Long Jack looked at the woman sharply.

"I have seen Mr. Paul Harney," he said, speaking slowly, and keeping his eye on the woman's face.

A smile broke over it, and her eyes flashed.

"How long since?" she asked.

"Within the hour."

It was her turn to look at him, trying to read his face.

"Where did you meet him?" she asked.

"In the street."

"And you recognized him?" she questioned quickly. She was thinking of Mr. Harney's disguise. Evidently he had removed it before Jack saw him.

"He was glad to see you, doubtless," she added, by way of a feeler.

"He told me to go to the devil."

"Ha! ha! ha! And you came to me!"

"Yes."

"Well, perhaps he has occasion to think me a devil, though I do not think he anticipated such an interpretation of his words."

"He is not the only one who has reason to think you a devil."

"Perhaps not."

"Is it not strange that Paul Harney should tell me to go to the devil?"

"*Pourquoi?* (wherefore?)" with a tantalizing shrug.

"There was a time when he feared me."

"All things must have an end."

"Listen. You know that I was never hard on Paul Harney."

"No. I think you reserved all your oppression for me."

Without heeding this thrust Long Jack went on:

"I never went to him for money unless I was in actual need. In the main I could always make all I wanted to spend."

"Robbing other men!"

"For your benefit, confound you!"

The woman smiled tantalizingly.

"Well, for the last eight or nine years I have had no need of his money, and have not been near him until last December."

"Ah! you saw him in December?"

"Not to bleed him. You were doing that, more effectually than I had ever done."

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"I saw him on different business," pursued Long Jack. "There was no word about money."

"He told me that you had no financial discussion."

"You knew it, then?"

"Oh, he keeps me informed of those affairs that affect our partnership. Why not?"

Long Jack repaid her saucy smile with a glare of hatred.

"Well," he said, speaking constrainedly, "to-night I am in need of money."

"And meeting him, you demanded some?"

"Yes."

"With your old modesty, no doubt."

"I told him I must have a thousand dollars."

"Ha! ha! Then it was that he told you to go to the devil?"

"He laughed in my face, as you do now."

There was a dangerous look in Long Jack's eyes. He was holding himself in restraint.

The woman did not heed it.

"For the same reason, unquestionably," she said.

"For what reason?" asked Long Jack.

"It is this—neither of us have any cause to fear you."

The gambler grated his teeth.

"Do not be too sure of that!" he said, menacingly.

"Oh! you are a shorn Samson! Did Monsieur Harney seem to fear you?"

"No. When I threatened him with the proofs, he told me to my teeth that I had not had a scrap of evidence against him for nineteen years."

"You could not deny it—that is to say, with truth."

"How did he know it?" demanded Long Jack.

"From my lips. How else?"

"Curse you! I could strangle you for that!"

"But will not, my dear Jacques!"

"Another thing—he said that you had had them all this time. You told me you had burned the paper, to shield me. Curse you! you were very solicitous for my welfare."

"In a moment of rashness, or drunkenness, I feared you might produce ze paper, and down yourself in dragging Paul Harney's head under water. In zat way I should have lost my Jacques!"

"But you said that you destroyed the paper, because the police were about to ransack your things in search for the property of one of your ballet-girls."

"True; but there may have been some fiction in that!"

"Did you or did you not burn the paper?"

"Oh! I am not so heedless as to burn anything so valuable."

"And you had it hidden all the while?"

"Did you not give it me for safe-keeping? Ha! ha! ha!"

For a time Jack choked with fury.

"And this night you sold that proof to Paul Harney for ten thousand dollars!"

Long Jack spoke in a hoarse, rasping voice. He was fairly livid.

For the first time the woman began to show apprehension. She turned pale beneath her cosmetics.

Before answering she slipped her hand between the folds of her dress skirt.

"By Heaven! I must have some of that money!" and with a swift motion he clutched the bosom of her dress.

"You have not had time to secrete it," he cried, exultantly.

The woman screamed, drew a stiletto and struck at him.

Long Jack guarded with his arm, receiving a flesh-wound, but shielding his breast.

Madame Angelice shrunk back at the same time that Long Jack jerked her toward him with such force that the bosom of her dress was torn out and left in his grasp.

But, before she could escape he clutched her wrist, tore the stiletto from her hand and with a furious oath sunk it to the hilt in her side.

The woman saw the deadly blow coming and screamed again; but after she was struck, she only gasped and fell to the floor with a thud.

Stung to fury by the deception the woman had practiced upon him, by the tantalizing manner in which she confessed it, and last by the blow she had struck at his life, Long Jack was for the moment utterly beside himself. When the woman fell and he realized what he had done, he gazed at her in stony horror.

Only a moment however. Then with a wild laugh, he stooped, thrust his hand into her bosom and drew forth a small roll of bills.

He saw the denomination of the outside one— one thousand dollars.

"By Heaven! I've got the whole haul!" he exclaimed, and with another wild laugh thrust it into his pocket.

Extinguishing the gas as he passed it, by putting his finger on the mouth of the tube, he opened the door, passed out, and without stopping to shut it after him sped down the stairs three at a time, brushing rudely against M. Bourdoine at the street entrance.

Query:—If Paul Harney had the proof of his rascality and Long Jack had the money, what was left for Detective Vesey and M. Bourdoine?

CHAPTER XL

HELENE!

As M. Bourdoine and Detective Vesey mounted the stairs leading to Madame Angelice's apartments the upper hall became the scene of great disturbance.

The other tenants of the house had rushed from their rooms, and the various halls were more brilliantly illuminated from the open doors. Frightened women were looking over banisters, or huddled together in groups of two or three, asking each other what was the matter. Several men were hurrying along the corridors or down the stairs.

"It was in Madame Angelice's room. See! her door is open, and no light burning," the detective heard one of the women say.

Familiar with all phases of crime, the detective immediately associated the man who had rushed by in the lower hall with Paul Harney's great agitation after meeting Madame Angelice. He straightway conceived an assassination, procured, if not executed by Paul Harney, to rid himself of one who had some hold upon him.

Stepping into the dark room, he saw an object dimly outlined on the floor, from which proceeded a moaning sound. Evidently the woman was not yet dead.

To strike a match and relight the gas was the work of an instant. Then the bloody work was revealed.

With exclamations of horror the people crowded the doorway. But before them all M. Bourdoine leaped to the side of the prostrate woman with a great cry, and cast himself upon his knees.

"Helene! Helene!" he cried, in excess of anguish, lifting her limp hand, and pressing it alternately to his heart and lips.

With an effort the woman lifted her heavy eyelids and gazed at him.

"Do you not know me? I am your Gaspard!" he said, addressing her in French.

"Gaspard! Gaspard!"

The woman gasped forth the name, and attempted to raise herself on her elbow.

"All these years—twenty long ages—I have followed you, now here, now there, never catching even one glimpse of you, zat I hunger so for. And now do I find you at last, dying! Oh, Helene!"

"Gaspard! Gaspard!" again aspired the woman, but this time with tenderness, extending her arms, and beginning to weep.

With a cry of mingled joy and pain M. Bourdoine clasped her to his breast, and sobbed over her in the wildest abandon.

"Let us get her on the bed, my friend," suggested Detective Vesey, laying his hand kindly on the Frenchman's shoulder.

"Ah! monsieur, ze spectacle pitiable! Behold! Life shall give her to my arms, only zat Death may snatch her away!" sighed M. Bourdoine, looking up with bloodshot eyes swimming in tears.

"Let me assist you to lift her," said the detective, quietly.

And suiting the action to the word, he raised her and placed her on the bed.

"Now, madame, one word. Who has done this?"

"Monsieur Jacques Boardman."

"Grand ciel! His blood!—I will have his blood!—drope by drope!—his heart's blood!"

"It is true, then, that he put the money in the pocket of the boy, Charles J. Wells, who was convicted of the forgery?" asked the detective, putting the question in a form to surprise her into a truthful answer, if on deliberate thought she would be disposed to conceal the truth.

"Yes," answered the woman, without hesitation.

"At the instigation of Paul Harney?"

"Yes."

"Who was the real forger? Who indorsed the check?"

"M. Harney himself."

"Have you known this all along?"

"For nineteen years."

"And you have betrayed him to no one?"

"No."

"He has paid you well, no doubt?"

"He dared not refuse me."

As she spoke the woman put her hand to her bosom, which was partially exposed by the tearing of her dress.

The detective noticed the movement.

"He paid you money to-night?" he asked, quickly.

Instead of replying, the woman felt in her bosom with a look of anxiety on her face.

"Is the money gone?" asked the detective.

"He has robbed me—he has robbed me!" cried the woman, wildly, "ten thousand dollars!" "Ten thousand dollars!" repeated the detective, in amazement.

"For the proofs!" said the woman, in explanation.

"For the proofs? What proofs?"

"The paper with the signatures."

"My God! Did you hold evidence against Paul Harney?"

"Yes! yes!"

"And you sold it to him this night?"

The detective stood aghast.

"Ah! Helene, you have ruined all!" cried M. Bourdoine, readily transferring his despair to the blighted prospects of his friends.

A cunning smile came into the face of the woman.

"Send these people away," she said, suddenly, waving her hand toward the gaping crowd that had now entered the room.

The detective turned, and with an authoritative manner that would brook no denial hustled them out of the room and shut the door. As he returned to the bedside, the woman said, looking at him distrustfully:

"He too!"

"Bote he is my friend," said M. Bourdoine, in English.

"Never mind. I will go," said the detective, divining that she had some revelation to make.

Going to the door, he opened and closed it, as if he had passed out. Where he stood he was beyond the range of vision of the woman.

"Well, Helene!" said M. Bourdoine.

"Gaspard, you love me, do you not?" she asked in French, which, however, was perfectly intelligible to detective Vesey.

"Ah! Helene, would I follow you twenty years if I did not?"

"And you have forgiven me?"

"Helene, I only know that every pulsation of my heart is for you."

"And I have loved you, Gaspard. I was insane to leave you. But the ballet intoxicated me. The manager promised me that my name should fill the whole world. And I meant to come back to you, Gaspard, when I was famous."

"Let us forget it all. We are once more united. What do you wish to say to me now?"

"You are not rich, Gaspard?"

"No, I am not rich."

"Well, I shall give you all, then."

"How? Have you money?"

"Listen. M. Harney gave me ten thousand dollars for the proof of his crime, and Long Jack has robbed me."

"Zat leave you nothing?"

"But I deceived the cotton-broker."

"Ah! you did not give him ze proof?"

"No; it was a clever imitation. Am I foolish, to sell the goose that lays me the golden egg?"

"And you still have ze proof?"

"The paper with the false signature? Certainly!"

"Thank God! Helene, you shall right ze great wrong zat have blight ze life of my friend—ze husband of my pupil."

"How?" cried the woman, in surprise.

"Produce zis evidence! Paul Harney shall languish in chains, my friend shall stand forth a vindicated man!"

"Ah! are you foolish? What becomes of my banker then?"

"Your banker?"

"While I hold this paper in terror over M. Harney, he must pay me what I demand out of his wealth."

Seeing the turn the conversation was taking detective Vesey had begun to make signs to M. Bourdoine, to intimate that he should not oppose the woman.

Not understanding the pantomime, M. Bourdoine regarded the detective with a questioning look.

Helene detected the look and raised on her elbow to see whom M. Bourdoine was looking at.

With a cry she suddenly fell back.

"Ah! she is dying!" cried M. Bourdoine, terrified by her ghastly pallor and the crimson foam that rose to her lips.

At this juncture there was a knock on the door from without.

"The doctor and a policeman are coming," called a voice.

While all had been standing in the room the alarm had not spread beyond the house; but when the detective had thrust them into the hall, they ran for a surgeon and an officer of the law, as a means of gaining readmission.

The door opened, and the two men entered with the crowd at their heels.

CHAPTER XLI

PAUL HARNEY'S "JIG IS UP."

DETECTIVE VESEY was personally known to both the doctor and policeman. A word in explanation of his connection with the case, and he was again in authority, and the room once more cleared.

"What is her condition?" he asked the doctor, after his examination.

"She cannot live long. If you have a deposition to take, you had better lose no time."

"Will you make her realize her condition? And I will go for a magistrate at once."

Detective Vesey hurried away, and soon returned with a portly man very much out of breath.

A great change had come over Helene. Between the doctor and M. Bourdoine she had been made to understand that the things of this world were slipping from her grasp.

She had expressed her willingness to make the deposition required of her, and begged for the attendance of a priest, who had been sent for.

The magistrate spread out his paper, and adjusted his glasses; and after the usual questions as to her belief that she could not recover, and the administration of the oath, he began to take down her words pertinent first to the violence to which her approaching death was attributable, and afterward, in a separate deposition, what she knew about the forgery.

The latter contained nothing of which the reader is not already informed, save that, on coming to America, the young ballet-dancer had formed with Long Jack an association which lacked the sanction of the church, and had thus become the repository of his secrets.

Detective Vesey then took out a warrant for the arrest of Mr. Paul Harney, charged with conspiracy with one John Boardman.

While the magistrate was making out this document, the detective took Helene's keys, opened one of her trunks by her direction, and soon had in his possession the paper to obtain which Paul Harney had given ten thousand dollars.

"If he has any doubts as to the genuineness of the other paper," he said, "he may keep it until morning to compare the penmanship with his writing nineteen years ago; and if we arrest him to-night, we may find it on him—which will be another proof of his guilt."

In the highest spirits the detective took the policeman and set out to make the arrest.

Meanwhile the priest had come, and Helene was left with him, the doctor, and the heart-broken M. Bourdoine.

Detective Vesey and the policeman approached Paul Harney's residence, which was in the suburbs of the city, and found all dark save a light in the library.

"His conscience keeps him from sleep, sir," said the policeman.

"So it seems. See, the windows of the library open on the veranda, and one of them is ajar to admit the air. If we enter that way, instead of going to the door, we may surprise him with the paper undestroyed, if he has not yet burnt it."

The first warning Paul Harney had of his midnight visitors was the sound of heavy steps on the veranda—only two of them, however, and then detective Vesey stepped through the window into the room, and the policeman was just at his back.

Paul Harney leaped to his feet and stood ghastly pale.

Snatching a piece of paper from his table, he put it in the gas-flame.

"Not so fast, if you please!" cried the detective; and with a bound he gained the broker's side, clutched his wrist with one hand and closed the other down over the burning paper, so as to extinguish the flame that was consuming it.

Paul Harney struggled desperately, and the paper was torn and crumpled; but it could easily be straightened out and the pieces matched.

In a twinkling the broker was overpowered and handcuffed.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" he demanded.

"When I show you this paper," said the detective, producing the one he had got from Helene's trunk, "you will see that Madame Angelice has played you a very clever trick, palming off upon you a forgery of your forgery. As for your accomplice, Long Jack, or John Boardman, if you please, we shall soon have him apprehended on a still graver charge—murder! Whether you have had a hand in that too may appear in the trial."

"Paul Harney, your nineteen-year-old jig is up! I am in the interests of the boy Charles J. Wells, now Egbert Stanhope."

Paul Harney was mute. As the detective had said, he realized that his jig was up.

CHAPTER XLII. A SKELETON HAND.

THE newspapers came out with flaming headlines, and all New Orleans was on the *qui vive* to get the particulars.

Mr. Craig was telegraphed for, and came home as fast as steam and iron could bring him. Even before he went home to his family, he sought the hotel where Egbert was stopping.

"Why, bless you, sir, the parlor's full!" cried the hotel clerk, in reply to his request to see Egbert. "I reckon all New Orleans knows him, or his father, or wants to make his acquaintance. He's done more hand-shaking since the thing came out than if he was President of the United States."

Mr. Craig waited to hear no more, but ascended to the parlor where Egbert was receiving the congratulations of his hosts of friends. Every one who had known Dr. Wells and honored him, now came to make reparation to his son for the bitter wrong he had suffered so many years.

Mr. Craig's entrance created a sensation. Every one drew back to make way for him to pass to Egbert.

Tears streamed down the old man's cheeks as he passed through the throng. Egbert advanced to meet him with outstretched hand and a smile of welcome.

The old man took the proffered hand, then bowed his gray head on the young man's shoulder and sobbed. He could not speak.

"My friends, I know you will excuse us," said Egbert, and with his arm about the old man drew him into an inner parlor.

In that interview the old man told of the love he had borne Egbert's mother, of the pain it had caused him to see her son come under the ban of the law, and of the joy he now felt in his vindication from crime. When they came forth the tie between them was almost as close as that of father and son.

The court being in session, the trial of Paul Harney came off without delay before the very judge who had sentenced the boy, Charles J. Wells. The conviction of the broker for conspiracy was a complete vindication of his victim, to which the judge added the promulgation of a declaration from the bench, exonerating Egbert from all blame, and in a feeling speech apologized for an error for which the fallibility of human laws and human wisdom was responsible. The sentence having long since been served out, this was all that could be done by way of reparation.

Helene died and was buried.

For a week M. Bourdoine behaved like a crazy man. Then he yielded to the consolations extended to him by his friends—that is to say, Sibyl and Adele—and became very much his old cheerful self.

"Shall I be sad when so great joy have come to my pupil?" said he, and kissed her hand for the thousandth time.

Long Jack was still at large.

Mrs. Cornish really loved her daughter, and the battle between that love and her pride had such an effect on her health that Felix's proposed European tour was prevented. Instead, they sought the genial influences of the South, traveling from point to point by easy stages.

Knowing nothing of the movements of Sibyl and her husband, chance brought the Cornishes to New Orleans within a day or two of the red-letter day in Egbert's life.

Felix's humiliation was unbounded. He stood before Egbert with bowed head, not looking into his face nor offering to take his hand.

"I can not put my feelings into words," he said. "I never had a very happy gift that way. But I want you to know that I have such a sense of having wronged you that any attempt at reparation or reconciliation seems like an added insult. I feel like dirt under your feet. If you should put some indignity upon me I would not resent it. I believe I should feel better if you would kick me once or twice. I put myself entirely at your disposal. Do with me as you like."

Egbert smiled.

"Well, if it is left so entirely to me, I elect to take you as a brother," he said, extending his hand.

"By Jove! I don't deserve it, Stanhope—I swear I don't!" exclaimed Felix, taking the hand rather sheepishly.

"I think every one will indorse my disposal of the matter—not least of all, Adele."

Felix looked at Adele, and his face was a study.

The girl now advanced with extended hand. She was as pale as death, but held her emotions in restraint with a strength that was marvelous.

Felix took her hand and then they stood mute, neither able to utter a single word.

This was a very different reception from that which he had received at the hands of his sister, who had cast herself into his arms and nearly smothered him with tears and kisses—she who had always been so stately. But in his humility Felix felt that he deserved this and more.

But he was overcome by a sense that Adele was lost to him forever, and letting her cold hand slip from his grasp he turned and left the room.

Like a spirit the girl glided from the apartment by another door, and away to her room, to cast herself on the floor in an agony of grief such as never had come to her, even in those first days when her love-dream had been shattered.

Egbert, Sibyl and Mrs. Cornish looked upon the strange behavior of the lovers in dismay.

"Now they must not begin to act foolish," said Mrs. Cornish, with some impatience. "There is no objection to their marriage now, if they like each other. Where is Adele's room?—I suppose she has gone to it. I will soon arrange her difficulty for her."

Mrs. Cornish had apologized to Egbert with a great deal of composure, defending her conduct as justified by the unfortunate circumstances then existing. Egbert had taken her condescension with a good grace, but now he did not want her to meddle with Adele.

"Perhaps it would be better to let them alone," he said, gravely. "No doubt they will arrive at a mutual understanding the first time they are alone together."

But as Adele took pains to avoid a *tete-a-tete* interview, and Felix was too deep in the Valley of Humility to presume to seek one, they were never alone together until the night of the grand reception given at Mr. Craig's house, and attended by all New Orleans.

Late in the evening Felix happened to pass Mr. Craig's library with Adele on his arm, and saw that the room was empty. Many of the guests had gone away, and most of those who remained were gathered in the spacious parlors for a last dance.

Almost forcibly Felix drew his companion into the room and shut the door.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE LAST CLOUD DISSIPATED.

"ADELE," said Felix, facing her abruptly, "I can't stand this. I'm eating my heart out. I know that in my infernal pride I trampled on your love and insulted you worse than I did Stanhope, if possible. But it ain't like you to bear malice, and—I don't know what to say to you, but I'd rather be hanged for a thief than have you stand out against me like this."

"Adele, you know my heart is wrapped up in you. Won't you let bygones be bygones, and come back to me?"

His voice broke and there were tears in his eyes as he extended his arms to her.

The girl stood before him in dry-eyed agony, vainly essaying to speak. She coughed to relieve the painful constriction of the throat. But she could only shake her head sadly.

"Have you ceased to love me?" cried Felix, in dismay.

She shook her head again.

"No—it's not that," she managed to articulate.

"Oh! if you still love me, you must forgive me. Come, my darling!"

He advanced with outstretched arms, but she shrank back, quivering from head to foot.

"Adele!" he cried, in a hurt tone.

She looked up at him, and by a mighty effort commanded her voice, though it was so hoarse as to be unrecognizable.

"I saw you shoot at him! I saw him fall!"

At that instant Felix saw what was between them. That terrible scene in the carriage on the dueling ground, when she had called him a murderer, rose before him. All eternity could not bridge that awful gulf.

Covering his face with his hands, Felix Cornish staggered back with a groan, as the door opened and Egbert entered with his wife on his arm.

"Ah! I beg your pardon," he said, and would have retired.

But Adele called:

"No! Egbert! Egbert!"

He turned, but before another word could be spoken there was an unexpected interruption.

"Ah! Mr. Stanhope! Just the man I'm looking for! I want you first, since all this fuss, which has resulted in my being hunted like a beast, originated with you."

Long Jack stood within the room. The open window showed how he had gained ingress.

As he spoke his arm went up, and a pistol-barrel gleamed in the gaslight. The next instant the room rung with a sharp report.

Felix saw the threatening danger. He leaped before Egbert, throwing out his arms with a gesture that made his purpose of shielding him apparent to all.

Before the room had ceased to echo with the report, Felix Cornish lay motionless on the floor. Sibyl screamed and fainted, while Adele stood like one suddenly turned to stone.

"Ah! well, it's just as well. I'll make you number two," said Long Jack, aiming at Egbert, and firing a second time.

But Egbert had leaped to the library table, and was in the act of throwing a glass paper-weight at his murderous assailant. The rapid movement of his body made Long Jack's aim uncertain, and though the ball spoiled his dress coat, it did not so much as abrade the skin; but the missile he hurled at the murderer struck him fairly in the face, and knocked him almost senseless. Then, with a bound, Egbert was upon him, and after a brief struggle Jack was disarmed and helpless.

The guests who came flying into the room found Adele with Felix's head pillowed in her lap. She looked up at them in a mute, dazed helplessness.

A physician being of the party made an immediate examination of Felix's breast.

"Friends," he said, looking up, "the man is only stunned. The ball has ranged along a rib. Something hard must have turned it from its course. Ah! here it is. Why, it's a shattered daguerreotype. Of—Ah! Miss Stanhope, I beg your pardon."

He handed the wreck to Adele. Mechanically she took it from him, saw the effigy of herself, and then everything got dark.

"Where is Felix?"

They were her first words on recovering consciousness in the room whither they had borne her.

When they told Felix that she had called for him, you ought to have seen his face!

By Egbert's contrivance every one left the room before Felix entered it. He fell on his knees beside the bed. It brought his face close to hers. He had seen the invitation in her eyes. "When you asked me to take you back, I shook my head. Now, will you be more generous and—take me?"

"Oh, my darling!"

M. Bourdoine, his long search done, has found a restful home with his loved pupil; and never had children such a jolly old man to trot them on his foot as does hers.

Egbert still wears gloves in company, but in the privacy of his little family circle he removes them; and Sibyl has pressed her dewy lips to his scarred palm so often that all the burning sensation of that letter F has been drawn out.

(THE HAPPY END.)

P. S.—Felix's boy has just come to town, and he calls him Egbert.

(A HAPPIER END.)

P. P. S.—Egbert has his revenge. He calls his Felix!

(THE HAPPIEST END OF ALL!)

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